

Spain: More military threats against Zapatero government

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28 January 2006

Further military threats have been made against the Socialist Party (PSOE) government in Spain. Following Spanish General Mena's threat to deploy the military to oppose the passing of a statute granting greater autonomy to Catalonia, Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has attempted to downplay the incident as the actions of a maverick. But the British *Financial Times* reported that Captain González of the notorious Legionnaires has now published a letter attacking Zapatero and describing widespread hostility in the military to the Catalan Statute which he says threatens the unity of the Spanish "fatherland."

González threatened to march his troops to Madrid and deliver the letter in person. The last time Legionnaires marched to Madrid was during the July 1936 military/fascist insurrection led by General Francisco Franco. This was greeted by a major uprising in the working class that halted the fascist advance, which was sabotaged by the Popular Front government dominated by the PSOE and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE).

González's statement was the second in a matter of weeks by a senior military figure. On January 7, retiring Lieutenant-General Jose Mena Aguado, commander of Spain's 50,000 ground troops, threatened military intervention should the PSOE government legalise the Catalan statute giving the Catalan autonomous government control over its own revenue and status as a "nation."

PSOE's Defence Minister Jose Bono dismissed Mena's statement as a matter of military "indiscipline." In a radio interview he praised the military: "No institution has adapted itself so completely to democracy as the armed forces."

Josep Bargalló, a leader of the separatist Catalan Republican Left in coalition with the majority Catalan PSOE, echoed the position of Bono. After stating that the ghosts of Franco still remained, he declared, "This is twenty-first century Europe. We do not have military uprisings."

The *Financial Times* explained that González's letter published by *Melilla Hoy*, a daily in the Spanish African

colonial enclave of Melilla, responded to the claims that there was no unrest in the military:

"Well, Mr. prime minister, your advisors have not told you the truth.... There is a lot of unease, within and outside the armed forces, which see how Spain is being dismembered, how the national flag is burned in public, how terrorists are allowed to hold demonstrations and social events, and how a generation of Spaniards no longer recognize Spain as their fatherland."

In earlier reports the *Financial Times* also sought to downplay General Mena's statement, declaring that the era of the "pronunciamento" or military coups was a thing of the past. This was repeated in the Spanish press. However in its response to Captain González, the FT have had to consider historical parallels to events prior to the civil war: "Capt González said his only doubt was whether he should have marched his legionnaires to Madrid, to deliver the letter in person, or publish it in the press. Few Spaniards would have missed the historical analogy: in July 1936, the military uprising led by General Francisco Franco also began with a rebellion of the Spanish Legion in colonial Morocco."

On January 24, the *New York Times* made similar palliatives to the strength of democratic institutions but then discussed parallels from Spanish history:

"It is a basic principle of democracy that army officers do not challenge the legitimacy of elected governments or talk about marching their troops into the capital to overturn decisions of parliament. Yet that is just what has happened twice this month in Spain, a country whose twentieth century history compels it to take such threats seriously ... it [is] easy to forget the horrors of the civil war and the brutal dictatorship that preceded it. Those nightmares began when right-wing army officers rebelled against an elected left-wing government they considered illegitimate and too deferential to regional separatists."

The *Times* then makes a direct parallel with the situation today and implicates the Popular Party in lending backing to the officers as a continuation of its efforts to de-legitimise the PSOE government and reverse the results of the 14

March 2004 general election.

The editorial continues, “Spanish society, Spanish politicians and, for the most part, Spanish military officers have come a long way from that era, moderating their views and deepening their commitment to democratic give-and-take. But the Popular Party has had a hard time getting over its electoral defeat nearly two years ago, days after the terrorist bombing of commuter trains in Madrid. It has never really accepted the democratic legitimacy of that vote. It is time for the Popular Party to move ahead. Spanish democracy needs and deserves vigorous bipartisan support.”

The PP rejected last year’s election result and has accused the PSOE of manipulating the antiwar movement to bring down the government of Jose Maria Aznar. On January 17, in the latest of a series of statements, PP Senator for Melilla, Carlos Benet, compared the election of the PSOE government with the military coups of 1874 and 1981.

Benet urged his supporters never to forget how the election in March 2004 had taken place. In 1874, he continued, General Pavia had entered the Congress on a horse. In 1981, Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejeros entered Congress with a pistol and Zapatero entered Congress in March 2004 with a suburban train. He was referring to the March 11, 2004 Madrid bombings.

It was popular anger at the attempt by the PP to blame the Basque separatist group ETA for a crime committed by Islamic fundamentalists in response to Spain’s participation in the Iraq war that galvanized public opposition to the PP and brought the PSOE to power. The PP has waged a campaign to proclaim this election victory as a coup. Benet’s statement is an old trick of the far right, accusing the PSOE of committing the crime that they themselves are ready to commit.

On January 3, 1874, General Pavia stormed the Cortes overthrowing the short-lived republican government and instituted a military dictatorship of General Serrano. On February 23, 1981, Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejeros stormed parliament during a televised session and fired shots into the roof and arrested ministers. The coup was aborted out of fear of socialist revolution. Both events were the outcome of conspiracies by the same social forces behind the present campaign of the PP.

The PP senator and president of the municipal council of Lugo (Galicia), Francisco Cacharro, defended Benet by stating he “expressed loudly a thought that is shared by millions of Spaniards.” Cacharro declared that Benet spoke about a fact with which “everybody agrees but that cannot be spoken about because there is no proof.”

José Manuel Soria, the PP’s leader for the Canaries—a Spanish colonial possession—added his support to Benet, describing Zapatero as, “the worst thing that has happened

to Spanish democracy since Tejero.”

The PSOE mildly requested an apology. Benet did so half-heartedly, passing off the incident as a joke in bad taste.

The recent military threats are a dramatic escalation of the PP’s campaign against the PSOE that began when Aznar accused the party of organising the protests outside PP headquarters on March 13, 2004. He described this as unconstitutional under the law that prohibits political campaigning the day before a general election.

Aznar and the PP have used this to demand a criminal investigation into the PSOE and ultimately to provide a basis for removing the government from office. He denounced the PSOE for allowing the working class to remove a government in a popular revolt. On July 5, 2005, the day before the official Commission of Inquiry into the Madrid bombings commenced, Aznar declared, “Terrorists had achieved their goal in toppling the government.” Aznar would also state, “It is difficult to recall another day so profoundly antidemocratic as March 13.... Those responsible for the protests are part of the left and they have the worst stains around their necks.”

On November 29, 2004, Aznar’s testimony to the commission was framed as a denunciation of the PSOE. He described as “unprecedented harassment of a government” and the “fabrication” of the theory that his administration “was hiding information.” He declared, “It was others who lied.... They perverted the truth and effectively supported a most serious breach of the rules of our democracy.”

Last summer the PP released a propaganda film entitled *After the Massacre*, which denounced the election victory of the PSOE as an act of “antidemocratic coercion” by the “left” and “anti-establishment” organizations. The film was produced by the PP’s think tank, the Foundation for the Analysis of Social Studies (FAES), for a meeting entitled “Free elections and their enemies: terrorism and radical agitation.” The film accuses the “left” of engaging in “two days of political agitation aiming at influencing the voting intentions of citizens,” and of using antidemocratic methods to seize power by organizing protest demonstrations—a “theatrical display rehearsed months before” in order to “seed the streets with hatred” and “blame the government for the massacre.”



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