

Spain: 16-year-old murdered by fascist

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Violent social and political conflicts have exploded in Spain's main towns, following the passing of the Law of Historical Memory by the Spanish Congress last month. The Law officially condemns the mass executions and other crimes carried out during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the military dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939-1975) that followed. The conflicts have already claimed several victims, one fatal, and provoked pitched battles between police and anti-fascist demonstrators. Several youth have been stabbed by neo-Nazi and racist thugs, and beaten up and imprisoned by the police.

One of the first confrontations took place in the Madrid Underground on Sunday November 11. Sixteen-year-old Carlos Javier Palomino died on the spot in the station of Legazpi after being stabbed in the heart. Another 19-year-old male received a stab wound to the chest, which caused his lung to collapse. He was taken in critical condition to hospital. Another youth was shot in the eye later by police. Others sustained lesser injuries.

The young people were travelling in a group with the intention of stopping a demonstration organised by the ultra-right-wing party "Democracia Nacional" in Usera, a working class district where many immigrants live. The demonstration was extremely provocative, called under slogans such as "Against anti-Spanish racism" and "Against immigration." It had been authorised by the Madrid government and was protected by hundreds of policemen. The fascist Frente Nacional (National Front) later held another protest against immigrants, with the slogan "For your security and that of your family."

After the stabbing, 24-year-old Josué Estébanez de la Hija, an Army soldier serving in the King's Immemorial Regiment, was pursued and caught outside the Underground station. After being treated in hospital, he was taken into custody, suspected of

carrying out the fatal stabbing of Carlos Javier Palomino. The soldier, of reported Nazi leanings, was travelling in the same train in order to take part in the Usera racist demonstration.

Since the death of Palomino, several demonstrations have been organised to protest his killing all over Spain. Most of them have ended in battles with riot police, who have been out in force. One demonstration in Caceres on November 22 ended in a further stabbing by a Nazi supporter of an anti-fascist youth, who is gravely ill in hospital. Many more youngsters have been badly hurt, either by fascist thugs or the riot police in further demonstrations.

The anti-racist and anti-fascist demonstrations have coincided with numerous rallies organised by extreme right-wing groups, including the fascist Falange Española. There were rallies honouring the dictator Francisco Franco on the anniversary of his death on November 20, 1975, and also the founder of the fascist movement, José Antonio Primo de Rivera. These included a demonstration that marched from Madrid to the Valle de los Caídos (the Valley of the Fallen), the monument built inside a mountain near Madrid by the slave labour of Franco's republican prisoners, where Franco and Primo de Rivera's tombs occupy the place of honour. With their stiff-armed salutes and cries of "Viva España!," the fascists gathered outside the tomb of the late dictator in advance of the implementation of the law. There were chants of "Reds no, Reds no!" and (Socialist Party Prime Minister) "Zapatero—you son of a bitch!"

Many of those in attendance said they would defy the new law. Jorge Espinos, a 21-year-old economics student, does not believe the government has the will to defy the fascists. "We will come regardless.... I am here because I am Spanish, and Catholic, to honour the memory of our Caudillo, the purest sword in Europe," before adding: "My grandfather killed 156 reds with his

machine gun in Galicia in 1936, and then went off to eat seafood.”

The most violent battles between anti-fascist demonstrators and the riot police occurred in front of the Falange headquarters, in Reyes Catolicos Street in Madrid, when dozens of demonstrators attempted to protest outside the nearby cathedral where a memorial to Franco was taking place. Many youth were hurt. The number of injured was kept down because the young people erected barricades to stop the advance of the police.

Many videos depicting the attacks by police on protests can be found on the front pages of Spanish daily newspapers. The youth taking part in these anti-fascist demonstrations are being dubbed in the media as “redskins,” “okupa” (squatters), “punks” and “ ‘truly violent’ anarchists.” Dozens of them have been arrested and beaten up.

“Elvira,” a reader of *El Pais*, the daily paper closest to the governing Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), commented on November 21, “I cannot understand why, in this supposed democracy...a mass is allowed [to be celebrated] in honour to the biggest assassin that Spain has had, Franco. That the singing of the Cara al Sol [the fascist hymn] is permitted. And that people who are demonstrating against these acts and against the assassination of our comrade Carlos are detained, stopped and attacked. I disagree. The freedom of speech is a right.”

Calls to ban demonstrations have been heeded by local governments that have prohibited some anti-fascist demonstrations, while openly racist and fascist ones are allowed and protected by police. Their argument is that the demonstrations against immigrants and working people are being called by legal political parties that have to be allowed their freedom of speech. Despite the ban on counter-demonstrations, these have gone ahead in the face of a massive police presence. Coshes and rubber bullets have been used on the demonstrators.

Students all over Spain have also organised demonstrations in protest at the murder of Palomino, as well as regional general strikes. Again, police have used brute force against them.

Some demonstrators in the Madrid district of Prosperidad carried political placards reading, “Aznar, Acebes and Fraga [the right-wing opposition Popular

Party leaders], their fascism is catching” and “PP, refuge for fascists?” They were forced to withdraw them by the organisers. The PP was founded after the death of Franco as a parliamentary vehicle for former Falangists. Manuel Fraga, who had been a minister under Franco, was one of the founders of the party. José Maria Aznar was the PP Prime Minister in the last administration, and Angel Acebes is the party’s current general secretary.

The Catholic Church has been in the forefront of defying the provisions of the new law, and organised several pro-Franco acts. It has celebrated masses all over the country, including at the Valley of the Fallen, where a rally was also staged in contravention of the legal prohibition of events there. By staging nominally “religious acts” such as masses for the soul of the dictator Franco and the founder of the Falange Espanola, the Church and its supporters have encouraged and in many cases organised extreme right-wing forces.



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