

Popular Party government honours Spanish fascists in Hitler's army

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Last Saturday, the government delegate in Catalonia of Spain's Popular Party (PP) government, María de los Llanos de Luna, handed a diploma of honour to a representative of the Brotherhood of Combatants of the Blue Division (Hermandad de Combatientes de la División Azul).

The Blue Division was a unit of Spanish volunteers that served in the German Army on the Eastern Front during the Second World War. The Brotherhood is composed of veterans of the unit, family members and revisionist historians involved in a project to rehabilitate the fascist regime of General Francisco Franco.

The Brotherhood was one of 30 civilian and military associations invited to an event hosted by the Civil Guard in Barcelona commemorating the Guard's 169th anniversary. Also present were Civil Guard General Chief Ángel Gozalo, Commander in Chief of Barcelona Francisco Barreiro, and the mayor of Sant Andreu de la Barca, where the ceremony was held, Socialist Party (PSOE) member Enric Llorca.

Although Spain under Franco did not enter the war on the side of Nazi Germany and remained officially neutral, Franco provided materials, such as tungsten, that were essential to Germany's armaments industry. Franco also authorized the creation of the Blue Division volunteers dedicated to the fight against "Bolshevism" as a thank you to Hitler for his support in the Spanish Civil War and aid in the crushing of the revolution.

In July 1941, after swearing a personal oath to Hitler, the Blue Division was formally incorporated into the Wehrmacht as the 250th Division. Almost half of the 45,000 to 47,000 soldiers who fought were killed or wounded.

Amongst its infamous veterans are Alfonso Armada

and Jaime Milans del Bosc, both of whom helped organise an aborted military coup in February 1981. They sought to overturn the newly created constitutional monarchy established after the end of Franco's dictatorship as the first step in the destruction of the workers' organizations that they blamed for the economic and political turmoil in Spain at the time.

The Government Delegation in Catalonia has remained silent on the award ceremony, leaving it to the Civil Guard in Barcelona to produce an "explanatory note" stressing that all the groups that paraded were "legal" and that the event was based "in a historical context that was not at all ideological." The statement exonerated Popular Party delegate de Luna, claiming that she was chosen randomly to present the diploma.

This is not the first time the Blue Division has received honours. In 2004, during the Socialist Party (PSOE) administration of José Luis Zapatero, Defence Minister José Bono allowed the Brotherhood of Combatants to march in the October 12 National Day military parade alongside survivors of the Leclerc Division, a unit of Spanish republicans under French command who were the first to enter liberated Paris toward the end of World War II. The aim was to equate the exiled republican soldiers who fought fascism with those who volunteered in the Nazi crusade against the Soviet Union.

On Tuesday, the PP followed its tribute to the Blue Division by blocking a motion of Izquierda Plural in Congress that July 18, the day Spain's civil war began in 1936, should be marked by a censuring of the Franco dictatorship.

The proposal made a concession to the right by calling vaguely for "recognition of all the men and women who were victims of the Spanish civil war," but

continued, “as well as those many who suffered afterwards as a result of the repression of the Franco dictatorship.”

The PP has spearheaded a right-wing counter-offensive against any attempt to investigate the crimes of the Franco regime and bring to justice those responsible, many of whom helped create the PP and controlled it for decades. The very limited Law of Historical Memory in 2007 condemned the crimes of the Franco regime, banned certain commemorations of the dictator, and offered minimal help in exhuming mass graves and identifying victims.

Since then, the PP, along with sections of the military, the media and the Catholic Church, have worked to defend the legitimacy of the Franco regime. They opposed the Historical Memory law for breaching the 1977 Law of Amnesty and the “Pact of Forgetting”—the reactionary agreement supported by the Communist Party and the PSOE designed to ensure the “peaceful transition” from Franco’s rule and preserve the capitalist state. At a time when masses of workers were demanding a reckoning with Francoism, they were told to “forget and forgive.”

In 2008, the right wing launched an attack on Judge Baltasar Garzón, who investigated the military coup of July 17, 1936 and the killing and disappearance of 114,266 people, for which he indicted Franco, 44 former generals and ministers, and 10 leading Falangists. He ordered the exhumation of 19 unmarked mass graves.

Garzón subsequently attempted to placate the right wing by dropping the case against Franco and his allies, but this did not save him. He was prosecuted and barred from practising as a judge for 11 years.

Since the PP came to power in 2011, it has encouraged a rewriting of the history of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship, approving a €100,000 government grant for the Spanish Biographical Dictionary published by the Royal History Academy, which includes many revisionist historians.

In the dictionary, fascist terror is systematically omitted, even though it was an established policy of Francoist forces. General Emilio Mola ordered his troops “to eliminate left-wing elements, communists, anarchists, union members, etc.” This is not mentioned.

Franco is described as having become “famous for

the cold courage he showed in the field” and as creating “a regime that was authoritarian, but not totalitarian.” The July 17 coup d’état is described as a “military uprising.”

Persecutions committed in the Republican zone are given full attention. One example is the Paracuellos de Jarama killings. In November 1936, some 2,000 pro-Franco “nationalists” were taken from republican prisons in and around Madrid and murdered at Paracuellos. The killings were carried out by the Stalinist Communist Party and the Soviet GPU under the command of Santiago Carrillo while Madrid was under siege. The dictionary states that “Carrillo applied a policy of revolutionary terror that he shared with all the organizations of the (anti-fascist) Popular Front.”

The PP has also passed a new education law, reminiscent of the Franco era, which reinstates religion as a subject that counts towards a high school student’s average grade, a determining factor in obtaining scholarships. The law also limits the teaching of the co-official languages (Catalan, Basque and Galician).

More recently, the government prohibited testimonies from being given at a teleconference with Argentinian Judge María Servini, who has invoked principles of “universal justice” to instigate an investigation of Franco’s crimes, following appeals by Argentineans whose ancestors were victims of his regime.

Under conditions where Spain is in a profound economic crisis, with mass unemployment and wages and working conditions deteriorating rapidly, the vehemence with which the PP defends Francoism is a warning that the ruling elite will use the same methods it used in 1936 against the working class.



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