

Spanish King Juan Carlos abdicates amid growing unpopularity of the monarchy

Alejandro López
4 June 2014

King Juan Carlos de Borbón announced on Monday that he was abdicating in favour of his son Felipe. Juan Carlos has reigned in Spain for 39 years, becoming head of state after the death of General Francisco Franco.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy explained in a brief address, “I have found the king convinced that this is the best moment for a change in the leadership of state with complete normalcy.”

Hours later, the king explained in a televised address, “When I turned 76 last January, I felt that the time had come to prepare the handover to make way for someone who is in the best possible condition to maintain ... stability.” This someone is his son, Felipe, Prince of Asturias.

The truth is that Felipe has been put on notice for years, ever since 2011 when the king was absent after a knee replacement. The media have ever since promoted Felipe, portraying him as a common man married to a middle-class woman.

Felipe will be crowned on June 18, amid the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, leading to a 56 percent youth jobless rate, 30 percent of children in poverty and one of the worst and growing levels of social inequality in Europe.

Added to this is the political crisis following the European elections. The two major parties that have imposed austerity measures, the ruling right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the opposition Socialist Party (PSOE), received their worst results since the first elections in post-Franco Spain in 1977. Their combined vote plummeted to less than 50 percent, compared to 80 percent in the 2009 European elections. Between them they lost over 5 million votes.

This is hardly a state of “complete normalcy”.

The monarchy too has seen its general support

collapse. Nearly two thirds of the Spanish population were in favour of King Juan Carlos abdicating. One poll in the daily *El Mundo* showed that, for the first time, fewer than half of the Spanish people (49.9 percent) want Spain to remain a constitutional monarchy.

Juan Carlos owed his position as head of state to the fascist dictator, General Francisco Franco. His grandfather, King Alfonso XIII, was forced into exile following the start of the Spanish Revolution and the overthrow of the 1923-1930 dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera, with which Alfonso was closely associated.

The Second Republic, proclaimed in 1931, introduced modest democratic measures. The Spanish ruling class reacted by conspiring to overthrow it, culminating in the July 18, 1936, coup d'état by Franco. The victorious fascist regime re-established the monarchy in Spain in 1947, and Franco appointed Juan Carlos as his heir apparent in 1969, closely supervising his training.

After Franco's death in 1975, Juan Carlos was dubbed “Juan Carlos the Brief”—an allusion to the widely held belief that he would not last long on the throne. The fact that he survived was due to the role of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and Communist Party (PCE), which connived with sections of the fascist National Movement to prevent a revolutionary reckoning with fascism during the transition to democracy.

The mass struggles initiated in the 1970s were demobilised by the PCE and its trade union organisation, the Workers Commissions (Comisiones Obreras, CCOO), in return for the limited concessions laid out in the 1978 Moncloa Accords and Workers' Statute.

Within a few years of the transition, on February 23,

1981, sections of the military attempted a coup d'état, during which Congress and the cabinet were held hostage for 18 hours. It failed and the myth was propagated that Juan Carlos had personally intervened to prevent it and that he personally “brought democracy” to Spain.

One of the main defenders of the king was Santiago Carrillo, leader of the PCE, who said, “The king played a decisive role in dismantling the coup of February 23. I am concerned about the ease with which the coup leaders are putting forward their defence [in court], which consists of giving the impression that the king is responsible for all this, and that also attempts to involve the political parties. If this permissiveness does not stop, the men on trial could undermine the role of the king, which in my opinion is very clear.”

The media has reacted furiously against anyone who has publicly questioned the official story. Journalist Pilar Urbano was castigated after she explained in her latest book that Adolfo Suárez, prime minister during the transition and the coup, suspected that the king was behind the plan for the 1981 coup.

El País wrote, “This campaign of smears and half-truths, breaking the most basic principles of journalism, has, to some extent, achieved its aim of sowing doubt in the minds of many people as to the role of the king in the 1981 coup. This comes precisely at a time when the monarchy is showing some signs of recovering its prestige, which has been dented in recent years by a number of scandals.”

The scandals to which *El País* referred to were the revelations in April 2012 of the king photographed in hunting gear beside an elephant he had shot on an €8,000-a-day safari trip in Botswana. It showed that not everyone was “pulling together” as a result of austerity, as claimed by the PP and the PSOE.

Along with this was the Nóos corruption case involving his daughter, Princess Cristina Federica de Borbón. Her husband, Iñaki Urdangarin, is accused along with his former business partner, Diego Torres, of tax fraud and siphoning money into offshore bank accounts and family companies, including the real estate agency Aizoon, co-owned by his wife.

Hours after Juan Carlos made his announcement, thousands protested against the monarchy in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Valencia, Alicante, A Coruña and Vigo. These protests were organised through social

networks and various pseudo-left parties, including Podemos, the Stalinist-led Izquierda Unida (United Left–IU) and others. These forces are cynically trying to channel the growing social opposition among the Spanish working class to austerity behind a call for a referendum on the monarchy and the establishment of a Third Republic.

In the 1930s, the Stalinists and social democrats justified their defence of the Second Republic (1931-1939) on the basis that a bourgeois democratic stage was necessary before a future struggle for socialism. Since then their political heirs have shifted so far to the right that they no longer appeal for socialism in even an undefined future. They are promoting a Third Republic on an explicitly capitalist basis.

By reducing the current crisis to one of the form of a capitalist state, they aim to oppose a struggle for socialism and a socialist republic while covering their own role in imposing austerity measures, as the IU does in the southern region of Andalusia.

For the pseudo-left groups, it is seen as an opportunity to curry favour with IU and the petty-bourgeois protest party Podemos.

The Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anti-capitalist Left) “calls all the citizens to come out on the streets and regain our democracy.”

The Morenoite party Corriente Roja “salutes the call of IU, Podemos and the nationalist [i.e., separatist] left and other forces to call for a referendum on the monarchy, to allow the people to throw off this reactionary institution.”

Clase contra Clase (Class against Class) called for the “left forces in parliament, like Podemos and IU” and “the leaderships of CCOO and UGT and the rest of the unions” to “prepare a general strike against the imposition of Felipe VI.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact