

Spanish government uses Paris terror attack to clamp down on democratic rights

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Last Sunday, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy participated along with other heads of government in the official march in Paris in defence of “freedom of speech” following the terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo.

His attendance was the height of hypocrisy. As minister of justice under Prime Minister José María Aznar (1996-2004) Rajoy closed down two Basque newspapers. He now leads a right-wing Popular Party (PP) government that is using every opportunity to clamp down on democratic rights.

The PP has used the latest attack on Charlie Hebdo to introduce new amendments to two pieces of legislation going through congress: the Citizens Security Law and the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC). Rajoy has summoned a “highest level” meeting with the Socialist Party (PSOE), the main opposition party, to reach an agreement on the changes.

An amendment to Article 573 of the CPC aims at punishing “with imprisonment of between one to eight years those who on a daily or regular basis access online communication services or acquire or are in possession of documents which target, or because of their content, result in inciting others to decide to join a terrorist organization or group.”

In other words, anyone who accesses web sites deemed to be supporting terrorism could find themselves in prison.

This is only one of the new changes in the CPC by the PP government. Another, prepared before the attacks, will legitimise mass surveillance. The police and security services will be able to tap mobile phones and intercept electronic communications without the authorisation of a judge, use false identities on the Internet, plant electronic surveillance devices and collect the DNA of arrested persons without their consent or that of a judge and without a lawyer being present, and install software to extract information from someone’s computer. The

circumstances in which this will be allowed are so broad that it could be applied to everyone.

The government is currently passing the Citizens Security Law, commonly called the “Gag Law,” which represents the biggest attack on democratic rights since the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco between 1939 and 1977. (See: “Spain passes police state measures”)

The law, which is opposed by 82 percent of Spaniards, is an attempt to prevent and suppress mass demonstrations, which are not controlled by the establishment parties and trade union bureaucracy.

The government is also using the attack in Paris to force through another article, which would allow the Interior Ministry to compile an airline passenger database. Spain is discussing with other European states to implement this database similar to that which already exists in the United States, Canada and Australia.

Spain has been preparing this legislation since December 2013, but was delayed due to the opposition of the Committee of Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs linked to the European Parliament, which considered such a law as a violation of the civil rights of airline passengers.

The new database, which is being introduced in several other European countries, will include more than the current passport information—the date the flight was booked; the date of intended travel; the full itinerary plans; address, phone number and email of the passenger; how they paid for the ticket (cash or credit card); how frequently they travel, whether they are alone or accompanied and have luggage or not; which agency processed the tickets; data on passenger boarding; trip cancellation; number of seats to be filled on the plane. The police will have access to all of this data.

On the same day Rajoy was marching in Paris in supposed defence of freedom of speech, High Court Judge

Javier Gómez Bermúdez allowed a criminal complaint to be filed against Spanish satirist Facu Díaz by the terror victims association, Dignity and Justice, an organization closely aligned with the hard-liners within the Popular Party.

In a three-and-a-half minute sketch broadcast during his comedy show in October, Díaz appeared dressed up as a balaclava-wearing member of the Basque separatist group ETA but with PP logos in the background. The satirist then announced that the PP was going to dissolve itself because of the hundreds of corruption cases linked with the party.

The government has been aided and abetted by the media, which has helped whip up an atmosphere of Islamophobia to force through these anti-democratic measures.

The day after the Hebdo attackers, Said and Cherif Kouachi, were killed in a siege, the right-wing daily *ABC* published a front-page headline which read, “France takes revenge.”

The pro-Socialist Party newspaper *El País* has been heavily involved in this racist campaign. The historian Antonio Elorza wrote an article in which he stated that the Paris attack had nothing to do with “imperialism, humiliations, etc.” Rather, “we have to recognise that Jihadist terrorism responds to an ideology based on the sacred texts of Islam.”

Another opinion piece, “The Deep South Catalonia Under the Imams,” by the writer Valentí Puig, blamed Muslims for bringing their families to Spain for the “overload” in public health care and education, excessive improvisation in positive discrimination in housing and school food grants. “It is possible”, Puig declared, “that the Generalitat [the Catalan regional government] has been busier Catalanising the Muslim immigrants than contributing to solving the dilemma that Catalonia shares with Spain and most of Europe ... This is something beyond poverty or social resentment because in reality this is a declaration of war from Islam against the West.”

The vice-director of *El País*, Luis Prados, bemoans the fact that there were no mass protests in solidarity with the attack in France, even though, he said, Spain, a country where thousands spontaneously protested against the killing of the dog belonging to a nurse infected with the Ebola virus last year, had also suffered from terrorist attacks, a dictatorship. He concluded by saying, “It is dramatically striking, finally, that it appears that Spaniards value freedom so little.”

Contrary to what Prados claims, workers and youth

have repeatedly demonstrated their readiness to oppose attacks on democratic rights, such as the mass protests against the current Citizens Security Law.

Spanish workers remember vividly how the PP under former Prime Minister José María Aznar attempted to use the Al Qaeda attacks in Madrid on March 11, 2004, to blame ETA in order to deflect attention from what many viewed as the consequences of the decision of Aznar to support the US-led war in Iraq in 2003, which 90 percent of the population opposed.

According to a survey by the *El Instituto Elcano*, a think tank closely aligned with Spanish foreign policy, only 45 percent support the participation of Spain in the war against ISIS in the Middle East. Felix Arteaga, senior analyst of the same institute, is forced to admit that even this claim is “very high taking into account the idiosyncrasy of Spanish strategic culture”, i.e., the general anti-militarist sentiment.

The current promotion of Islamophobia by the media and especially *El País*, which for decades since the transition from the fascist dictatorship of Franco to bourgeois democracy projected itself as the progressive newspaper, is a sign of deep crisis in capitalist rule and a shift to the right in Spanish and European politics.

The Spanish political establishment, having failed to instigate mass xenophobic sentiments and scapegoating immigrants for the capitalist crisis amongst the working class, aims at reversing this situation. Beset by unemployment at 24 percent, and 53 percent among youth and poverty levels affecting a quarter of the population, it is seizing the attack in Paris to legitimize police state measures to impose more austerity on the working class.



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