

Spain: Pseudo-left concedes to right wing over street name changes

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The Madrid Council, controlled by Ahora Madrid, a pseudo-left front supported by Podemos, has made significant concessions to the right wing over the decision to change the names of streets left over from the Franco dictatorship.

The ability to rename streets was supposed to be made easier by the Law of Historical Memory, passed in 2007 by the Socialist Party (PSOE) government of José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero after years of campaigning by families of the dictatorship's victims. In addition to speeding up the removal of Franco-era statues, memorials and street names it was the first time that the crimes of the fascists were condemned and state support (of a limited character) provided for the exhumation of mass graves.

However, little was done and in most cities, towns and villages in Spain streets named after fascist generals, bureaucrats and battle victories abound.

The aim of the law was to divert the striving for truth about fascism in the population into safe channels for the Spanish ruling class. It continued the pact of “forgive and forget” enshrined during the transition from Francoism to bourgeois democracy and its central claim that all sides in the Civil War were guilty of carrying out crimes.

To continue the pretence that Ahora Madrid and the Podemos-backed mayor of Madrid, Manuela Carmena, offered a left alternative to the main bourgeois parties, the Historical Commission it created announced in July that it was proposing to change the names of 27 streets in the capital—out of the several hundred submitted for consideration.

That the commission continues to peddle the same post-Franco “forgive and forget” line was made clear by two of its leading members, Francisca Sauquillo and historian Alvaréz Junco, in a letter to *El País* titled “A Pedagogic Measure.” They insisted that “we have to reject, of course, all spirit of vengeance”—a plea repeatedly made by the defenders of the Amnesty Law of 1977 that prevented any reckoning with the crimes of fascism.

Sauquillo and Junco insist that the Civil War was not the

result of the intensification of the class struggle in the 1930s, which culminated in the Spanish bourgeoisie carrying out a coup and waging a civil war against the working class. Instead, they write, war was the result of “political passions that led people to barbarism through their mutual extermination.”

Sauquillo and Junco make clear that the commission's task is not to condemn Francoism and its supporters. They declared: “This is not about establishing a canonical version of the past that lays out the merits and responsibilities of everyone in the very complex internal conflicts and debts arising from such actions. We will also not get into the swampy debates about individual persons nor make judgements about the guilt and merit of different social groups in the present.”

This is expressed in the criteria for the new names being proposed for the 27 streets—“consensus” and “people we can all feel proud of.” As a result, the replacements combine “left” historical figures associated with defending the bourgeois order and fascist sympathisers.

Among them are Marcelino Camacho, a member of the Stalinist Spanish Communist Party (PCE) and General Secretary of the CCOO trade union during the Transition to democracy; Julián Besteiro, a leader of the right wing of the Socialist Party (PSOE) in the 1930s; and Melchor Rodríguez, leader of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT and one of the staunchest defenders of the Popular Front in Spain in the 1930s.

The Popular Front, formed in 1936, signalled an official end to the objective of proletarian revolution on behalf of the Stalinist Communist parties and was instead a policy of class collaboration with liberal, republican and social democratic parties in defence of one's own nation-state on the basis of a “two-stage” theory of, first, the unified struggle for bourgeois democracy and only then, at a later date, for socialism.

The fascistic figures now to be honoured include Mercedes Fórmica, a member of the fascist Falange party. Fórmica deserves recognition, according to the commission, because

she “denounced the suffering of married women victims of gender violence” under Francoism. Another right-winger is Carlos Morla Lynch, the Chilean ambassador in Madrid during the civil war and an open Franco sympathizer. He used his diplomatic position to provide protection and grant asylum to right-wing elements and fascists.

The capitulation of Podemos is also shown over the proposal to change the name of the street named after General~Millán Astray, who, in the words of the liberal historian Paul Preston, was “the person who exerted the most influence in the ideological and moral training of Francisco Franco. Sanctified in life as the ‘glorious cripple,’ his contribution to the violent ideology of the Spanish far right was unique, thanks to the creation of the Foreign Legion. In it he who institutionalized and evangelized the brutal and brutalizing values which Franco fought for and won in the Spanish Civil War” (*Las Tres Españas del 36*, Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1998).

The name change provoked a furious response from the legion, which remains an elite unit in the Spanish Army. The Brotherhood of the Spanish Legion, which has around 100,000 members, delivered a nine-page letter to the commission full of historical falsifications and an outright glorification of Astray, and threatened to mobilise its members in protests.

The main right-wing bourgeois press, including *La Razón*, *ABC* and *El Mundo*, joined the attack on the commission for having “opened up the wounds of the past”—uncritically quoting the letter from the Brotherhood while ignoring Astray’s fascist sympathies.

Ahora Madrid reacted to these threats by sending Sauquillo to meet with representatives of the Brotherhood. Reports suggest there was an atmosphere of “maximum cordiality” and that the commission might draw back from changing the name of the street.

The continued prostration, compromises and capitulations of the Stalinists, the PSOE and the pseudo-left have strengthened the offensive undertaken by the right to rehabilitate Franco and his regime and prepare the ideological climate for the capitalist class to once again use the same bloody methods to defend its order.

In March this year, Stanley Payne, the right-wing historian, was invited to give a lecture at the Spanish Centre for National Defence Studies, where he legitimised Franco’s coup and 40-year dictatorship.

The Popular Party (PP) government has given a diploma of honour to representatives of the Brotherhood of Combatants of the Blue Division, which fought alongside the Nazi army on the Eastern Front during World War II, and the Ministry of Defence has helped repatriate the remains of these soldiers from Russian soil. Hundreds of thousands of euros

have been given to fund the Spanish Biographical Dictionary, a collection written by prominent revisionist historians that whitewashes the Franco dictatorship.

At the same time, the PP has ignored United Nations recommendations to continue with Civil War grave exhumations and has cut funding for it.

The role of Podemos is to stifle popular opposition to militarism and fascism. Its Madrid affiliate has made noises about the commission for including people such as Junco, who infamously opposed the annulment of sentences handed down during trials under Francoism. But this is a tactical manoeuvre, aimed at distancing itself from the right-wing commission, remaining in Ahora Madrid—with its perks and privileges—and promoting Carmena as a “mayor of change.”

Should a Podemos government or coalition ever come to pass, it would do no more for the victims of Francoism than previous PSOE or PP governments. To repeal the Amnesty Law of 1977, and bring to justice the fascists still living in wealth and splendour, and open up the military, church and police records to public scrutiny, would be to challenge the whole post-Franco consensus established by the Stalinists, the trade unions, the social democrats and the Francoites themselves in the aftermath of Franco’s death in 1975.

Podemos’ role is not to challenge these accords but to channel mass discontent towards the formation of a new capitalist government in which it participates as a left cover. Its track record is composed of defending NATO, putting forward a former chief of staff as one of its top election candidates, publicly committing itself to austerity and parroting patriotism to the point that the right-wing online daily *El Confidencial* could boast that Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias “has returned patriotism to the people of the left.”



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