

Spanish government promotes militarism in schools

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Spain's Popular Party (PP) government has designed a new syllabus for 6-to-12-year-old schoolchildren, "Social Values and Ethical Values," which promotes militarism and Spanish nationalism. The syllabus has been designed by the Ministry of Education National Centre for Innovation and Educational Research (CNIIE) and the Ministry of Defence Security and Defense Coordination and Studies Division.

The reactionary content is evident in the leaked 245-page draft syllabus, which is composed of 10 teaching units, including the need to respect the army, the police, the flag, the anthem and the King and to uphold the unity of Spain.

The Socialist Party (PSOE) and the pseudo-left Podemos organisation are fully behind the PP's approach, disagreeing only on the way it is presented.

In a debate in the Spanish Senate this week, PSOE senator Begoña Nasarre declared, "The youngest have the right to know what their armed forces are, a fundamental part of the security and protection of the country and the exercise of our rights and freedoms." She criticized the PP because it had removed the "Education for Citizenship" topic from the school curriculum, which had been formulated "with participation from all areas and sectors... and maximum consensus."

According to Europa Press, Podemos Senator Sara Vilà "has not questioned whether a defense culture should exist, but has disagreed about what should be taught in it and why it should exist. In her opinion, the main driver of this objective should be to explain in a 'transparent' way... what the Ministry of Defence does with public money."

Vilà declared that "society will never be close to the military" while it continues to be "an opaque, closed space, with a parallel justice system and without the right to organize or freedom of expression."

In the new syllabus, teachers will have to "explain to the students how national defence is the responsibility not only of the armed forces," but that Article 30 of the Spanish Constitution states that all Spaniards have "the right and duty to defend Spain."

Children will have to learn the anthem of the armed forces

and its different divisions (land, sea and air), create publicity posters for the National Day parade, and make pins showing the Spanish flag.

In one of the computer games created for classroom use, the children will extinguish a fire with help from the Military Emergencies Unit (a branch of the Spanish army responsible for providing disaster relief), which will end with a video saying, "They are a public service in the service of Spain." In another game, children will design cards to show through drawings and phrases "how they as citizens can help national defence."

Another activity will focus on building teamwork and military values, such as discipline and hierarchy. Children will solve a military-themed puzzle in which "all the pieces are important." The different ways to enter the army will be explained by a video titled "There Are a Thousand Reasons to Join."

Another game talks about the "real threats that affect Spain," including terrorism, organized crime and "illegal" migration. In addition, it identifies the military as "the state's fundamental tool for national defence." In the game, children will simulate being soldiers "working for peace" and helping rebuild cities destroyed by war.

In an exercise called "We Want to be Soldiers," children will be indoctrinated in Spartan values. They will be required to "fill out a form to verify that they meet the necessary requirements to be a good soldier: to be studying 1st or 2nd year of primary education, to exhibit good behaviour in class and not be punished by a teacher, to allocate time to study on a daily basis, to do physical exercise every day, and to respect companions and professors."

The syllabus continues: "Next, they will take a military card in which they fill in their information and cut out and paste a photograph; this will accredit them as an authentic soldier."

Private and semi-private schools, which make up 32 percent of Spain's education system, are also targeted. Minister of Defence María Dolores de Cospedal signed a

memorandum of understanding with the Association of Private Teaching Centres so that their “teachers and students know the role of the army” and teach that the Armed Forces “are a good way to strengthen our nation.”

Teachers in private schools will be required to include courses taught by the Ministry of Defence, and schoolchildren will be taken to military facilities such as museums or barracks to see “first-hand the work of the army and the navy.”

Ironically, the announcement of the new syllabus comes amid a massive campaign spearheaded by the main political parties and the Madrid-based press accusing the Catalan education system of indoctrinating children in Catalan secessionism and nationalism.

Such militarist indoctrination in the guise of education is not to Spain. For nearly 40 years (1939-1978), children were indoctrinated in fascist values under the regime of General Francisco Franco, in the form of the compulsory subject called “Instruction in the National Spirit.” The course included lectures on “The Essence of Spanishness,” “Anti-Spanishness throughout History,” “The National Movement, an Effort to Recover Spanishness,” and “Spain’s Mission in the World.”

A student would encounter passages such as: “And what is Spain? It is a blessing from God;” “The state exerts its paternal action on all citizens so that they feel as happy as possible;” “If the citizens of a state are allowed to think however they want in politics, we will have social chaos instead of an organised people;” and “Spain is a totalitarian state: a single chief, a single command, a single obedience.”

Then as now, the Spanish ruling class aims to promote militarism as way of suppressing the class struggle, deflecting social tensions outward and projecting its imperialist ambitions. These objectives were spelled out very clearly in the recently updated National Security Strategy, which foresees the “uncertainty” of a world with “increased geopolitical tensions.”

The document argues that internally the ruling class faces major threats and challenges from secessionist movements as in Catalonia, as well as from an ageing population, rising inequality, a lack of “quality jobs” and high unemployment. Externally, the major threats include “oil dependency” from unstable sources, “new actors challenging the multilateral system [an unveiled reference to Russia and China], droughts, floods and forest fires” caused by climate change, economic protectionism, terrorism and cyber-attacks.

Beset by these threats, Spanish imperialism declares that “the following areas are of special interest for National Security: Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, North America and Asia-Pacific,” i.e., pretty much the whole world.

To realise its grandiose imperialist ambitions, Spain announced earlier this year that it will more than double its defence budget by 2024, from €8.7 billion to €18.47 billion.

The Strategic Plan of Grants of the Ministry of Defence, leaked to eldiario.org, explains very clearly the objectives of this campaign: to increase the sense of external threat, increase the percentage of the population that accepts foreign interventions by the Spanish army, supports Spain’s role in NATO and sees as “insufficient” the resources given to defence.

The new school syllabus is an attempt to promote “the culture of defence” and overcome the population’s traditional hostility to the army as a result of the crimes it perpetrated in its former colony in northern Morocco (1909-1927) and during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship.

More recently, in 2004, Popular Party Prime Minister José María Aznar was forced from office largely because of his support for the Iraq War, and his PSOE successor José Luis Zapatero was forced to withdraw Spain’s troops.

Targeting children for militarist propaganda is just the latest in a series of strategies rolled out by the ruling class. It has sought to counter anti-militarist sentiment by branding military intervention as humanitarian—in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Libya and Syria—with the aid of the Stalinists and pseudo-left groups. Resources have been made available for funding books, conferences and films glorifying the army and rehabilitating Francoism and legitimising its methods.

Beset by mass unemployment, poverty affecting a quarter of the population, and the growth of social opposition, the political establishment has no answer other than the “culture of defense.” This must be taken as a dire warning that the ruling elite will use the same methods it used in 1936 and is employing today in Catalonia against the entire working class.



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