

Spanish army hails record of fascist dictator Francisco Franco

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With a statement hailing fascist dictator Francisco Franco, 181 retired top Spanish army officers have declared their support for Franco's policy of mass murder to crush opposition in the working class. It is a warning to workers not only in Spain, but across Europe and internationally. Amid rising social anger and strike activity against austerity and militarism across Europe, the ruling class in desperation is plotting civil war to suppress social opposition.

The July 31 manifesto, "Declaration of Respect to General Francisco Franco Bahamonde, Soldier of Spain," signed by a group of retired generals, colonels, admirals and frigate captains including the former head of Spain's land army until 2016, General Juan Enrique Aparicio, is unambiguous. Published in the pro-Francoite Asociación de Militares Españoles (AME-Association of Spanish Soldiers), it endorses as the savior of Spain a fascist dictator who butchered hundreds of thousands of workers during the Spanish Civil War and founded a brutal, 40-year fascist dictatorship.

They criticize the new Podemos-backed minority Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government's cynical attempt to rally support among workers and youth with a few impotent criticisms of Franco, including plans to move Franco's remains out of a mausoleum in the Valley of the Fallen. They are well aware that the PSOE's pro-austerity government is deeply unpopular due to its austerity policies, and that it hangs by a thread.

Attacking the PSOE's hypocrisy, they note that its anti-Franco campaign promotes "a false progressiveness that hides the reality of the Nation's current territorial collapse and the evident inequality among the Spaniards."

They denounce "constant attacks on the person of General Franco since his death, slowly but surely erasing all traces of his work for Spain in the historical moments that he had to live." They blame the "political left" for unleashing "an unprecedented campaign that is incomprehensible if one forgets its visceral drive to erase a half-century of our History, through the final attempt to erase the chief architect that prevented that history from disappearing."

They hail Franco's "unique command of Spain, assaulted and besieged by international communism and taken over by the Popular Front."

Franco's infamous record is well known. He led an illegal fascist coup in 1936 that plunged Spain into a three-year civil war, shattered cities across the country, and led to the murder of 200,000 political oppositionists, left-wing intellectuals and militant workers. An additional 400,000 people were imprisoned in jails and concentration camps, where many died of malnutrition and starvation. A half-million people fled Spain as political refugees.

Under the four decades of the Francoite regime, thousands were arrested, tortured and killed by the secret police. Strikes, political parties and unions were banned, and democratic rights suppressed. Newspapers and books were censored, and higher education was only available to the privileged.

The fact that a broad swathe of Spain's officer corps sees this as a positive example is a warning. Fascism was not a political accident of the 20th century, but the inevitable political outgrowth of capitalism. After a quarter century of increasing war and militarism since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a decade of deep austerity since the 2008 Wall Street crash, ruling circles are again envisaging such policies as they face an ever more hostile and angry population.

The European Union (EU) has shifted far to the right, and ultra-right forces increasingly shape its political agenda. This summer, the EU agreed to drastically intensify its anti-refugee policy, with plans to hermetically seal off Fortress Europe, deport refugees en masse to war zones in the Middle East and Africa, and build a vast network of concentration camps across Europe and the Mediterranean. These camps, as the WSWs has warned, will inevitably be used against political opposition in the working class.

The Spanish officer corps' decision now to hail the Franco regime confirms that these reactionary policies are setting into motion the drive to civil war within Europe itself.

At the same time, particularly this year, the class struggle

has sharpened internationally. There have been powerful strikes by US teachers, German and Turkish metalworkers, and French and British rail workers. In Spain, 8 million working hours were lost due to strikes in the first quarter of this year, 51 percent more than the same period last year. Amazon workers struck last month. Industrial action among pilots, ground staff and air traffic controllers in Spain has reached historic levels.

As the ruling class hails fascism and war, the alternative is the building of the revolutionary vanguard of the working class. The key question is the political mobilisation of the entire Spanish and European working class in struggle on a revolutionary and socialist program. For this, the working class needs to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Spain and across Europe.

Critical lessons must be drawn. If the army feels emboldened to hail Franco's mass murder of the working class, it is due above all to the reactionary role of the PSOE, the Stalinist forces inside Podemos, and also Podemos's Pabloite faction, consisting of allies of France's New Anticapitalist Party (NPA). Podemos and a broader layer of petty-bourgeois, anti-Trotskyist parties working in its periphery are totally bankrupt and hostile to the working class.

The Podemos-backed PSOE government is now implementing an austerity budget while ramming through the highest military expenditure since Franco's death over 40 years ago.

During Madrid's violent crackdown on the Catalan independence referendum last year, which left 1,000 injured as voters attempted to protect the ballots from police, the PSOE supported the right-wing Popular Party (PP) government's brutal repression. Together with Podemos, they then backed the imposition of an unelected government in Catalonia, the jailing of Catalan nationalist leaders on fraudulent charges, and the holding of Spanish nationalist rallies in Barcelona.

The PSOE-Stalinist "forget and forgive" pact with the Francoites during the Transition from authoritarian rule to parliamentary democracy in the 1970s, in order to block a revolutionary seizure of power by the working class, stands exposed as completely rotten. Despite mass opposition to fascism, the PSOE and the political ancestors of Podemos entered into a deal that saved the entire Francoite apparatus. Now the retired generals, who grew up in the waning years of Francoism, and having backed the mass assault on peaceful Catalan voters, look again to the legacy of fascist repression.

Indeed, the issuing of this letter points to some of the ways the Transition allowed the fascists to survive. After decades of PSOE government since 1978, the AME still has

offices in army barracks, receives state subsidies and publishes the newspaper *Militares* (Soldiers) that is freely distributed among Spanish soldiers.

Many of the signatories of the AME statement were promoted under successive PSOE governments. They base their defence of Franco on Article 21 of the Royal Ordinances for the Armed Forces, approved in 2009 under PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which stipulates, "Members of the Armed Forces will feel as heirs and depositaries of the Spanish military tradition. It is their duty and a reason for encouragement for the continuation of its work to give tribute to the heroes who forged Spain's military tradition and to all those who gave their lives for Spain."

Amid an unprecedented social and economic crisis, the cynical and symbolic "anti-fascist" measures of the PSOE and Podemos, like the removal of Franco's remains from his mausoleum, are only emboldening the fascists. As of this writing, the PSOE and Podemos have still maintained a cowardly and deafening silence on the generals' statement.

These events are a historic confirmation of the enduring significance of Trotsky's struggle against both fascism and the social democrats and Stalinists, who in Spain suppressed the revolutionary struggles of the working class during the Civil War.

The only force fighting for a Trotskyist political perspective for the working class to take power is the ICFI. Rejecting the Stalinists' strangling of the mass struggles against the Francoites in the 1970s and the Pabloites' adaptation to it, the Trotskyist movement struggles to arm the working class with a socialist and internationalist programme against social inequality, militarism and the turn to authoritarian forms of rule. The way forward in the struggle against the growth of police-state and fascist forces is building sections of the ICFI in Spain and internationally.



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