

Podemos joins cover-up of Spanish army brass' hailing of Franco dictatorship

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Fully three weeks after hundreds of retired Spanish army officers signed a manifesto hailing fascist dictator Generalissimo Francisco Franco (1892–1975), the Podemos party finally broke its cowardly silence on the issue. It was only, however, to support the pro-austerity, pro-war Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government, and downplay the significance of the officers' statement.

On August 20, the general secretary of the Podemos parliamentary group in the Spanish Congress, Txema Guijarro, declared: "It seems absolutely scandalous to us that officials of a body that is not deliberative, but that instead should obey the public authorities, spend their time issuing comments so disconnected from history and that depend on parameters from 80 years ago. It is really disheartening to see that it is so hard for them to turn the page."

Against the officers' reactionary manifesto, Guijarro defended the minority PSOE government's proposals for a symbolic removal of Franco's remains from the official mausoleum in the Valley of the Fallen: "Given the historic conditions, it's a gesture that, even if it comes a bit late, seems relevant." He said it is "hard" to preserve "high-quality democracy" without "recognizing the errors and barbaric acts committed in Spain during a long and sinister dictatorship."

These complacent remarks testify to the bankruptcy of what passes for "left" politics in Europe. The issue is not that the Spanish officer corps is obstinately wasting its time by refusing to "turn the page" on long-dead disputes. Factions of the army and ruling class, feeling desperate and isolated in the face of growing strikes and political conflict today, are legitimizing fascism in the 20th century so as to prepare for war and the recourse to mass repression in the 21st.

In this, they have enjoyed the tacit backing of Podemos. There is deep, historically rooted opposition in the working class in Spain and internationally to fascism. However, the cowardice and complacency of Podemos is a warning: the only way for workers and youth to oppose the drive towards repression and war is to build Trotskyist parties, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), in opposition to the pseudo left.

The officers' July 31 statement hailed Franco as the "chief architect" of Spain's history and his "unique command of Spain" during the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. This consisted of leading an illegal fascist coup against an elected government, plunging Spain into a war during which Franco allied with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, and sealing his victory with mass executions of 200,000 political oppositionists and militant workers. Significantly, the statement hailed Franco's drowning of the 1934 strike and uprising of Asturian miners in blood.

As Podemos remained silent, hundreds more retired top officers signed this statement. Originally signed by 181 officers, it now has at least 672 signatories including 62 former generals—roughly one third of the total active number of general officers in the Spanish armed forces. Alberto Asarta, former chief of the UN military mission in Lebanon, and Juan Aparicio Hernández-Lastras, who led the Spanish army until 2016, have

both signed.

The statement comes from an army that led four military coups in the 20th century—in 1923, 1932, 1936 and 1981. Significantly, the signatories include Ricardo Pardo Zancada and F. Javier Dusmet García-Figueras, both convicted for joining the abortive military coup of February 23, 1981, launched by fascist officers hostile to the 1978 transition from the Francoite dictatorship to parliamentary rule.

The decision of broad sections of the Spanish army with a record of supporting military dictatorship to explicitly hail the crimes of the fascist regime is a warning to workers in Spain and beyond. After a decade of the deepest economic crisis, social austerity and mass unemployment in Europe since the 1930s, class tensions are at the breaking point. Amid strikes in the ports, airlines and retail in Spain, strikes against austerity in France, and protests against the German ruling elite's promotion of militarism, the financial aristocracy is turning towards mass repression.

Last autumn, the minority Popular Party (PP) government sent paramilitary *Guardia Civil* to assault voters in the independence referendum called by the Catalan bourgeois nationalists—sending nearly 1,000 people to the hospital as *Guardia Civil* smashed into election halls, stole ballot boxes and beat peaceful voters, even elderly women. Afterwards, Spanish media discussed plans for sending Special Forces and armored infantry against the Catalan capital, Barcelona. Madrid then imposed an unelected government on the region.

While carried out under the PP, the repression enjoyed the backing of the PSOE and of Podemos, who endorsed the PP in the Congress and mobilized no protests against it. In the final analysis, the PP itself was in power only on their sufferance, a point Podemos and the PSOE drove home by jointly mustering a parliamentary majority in May to unseat the PP and then install a minority PSOE government.

The minority PSOE government—which depends on Podemos support to maintain a parliamentary majority, and is a PSOE-Podemos coalition government in all but name—continued the PP's austerity budget, including its multi-billion-euro increase in military spending.

The only reason that the Spanish army feels free to announce its fascist colors and plot military action against the Spanish population is that mass popular opposition to Francoism is suppressed by the reactionary role of Podemos and its various allies. The Francoite manifesto is not a statement of strength, but of the weakness and desperation of the ruling class. Their intrigues rely primarily on the fact that they have met no tendency organizing serious political opposition based in the working class.

Rather, the army brass only face populist-nationalist middle-class groups like Podemos that support imperialist war, have deep ties to military and intelligence agencies and that, above all, are neither willing nor able to mobilize the vast opposition that exists to Francoism and the European Union (EU). In the vacuum on the left created by Podemos and its evident cowardice and bankruptcy, the Francoites feel they face no meaningful opposition. This only emboldens them to intensify their reactionary conspiring.

In the periphery of Podemos, the Valencian nationalists of *Compromís* were the first to indicate differences with the manifesto. However, it was only to ask for information on how much in public subsidies had gone to the pro-Francoite *Asociación de Militares Españoles* (AME-Association of Spanish Soldiers) that issued the manifesto—a request that *Compromís* then buried in the Senate.

The PSOE government has launched a “classified” investigation of the pro-Franco manifesto. This is simply damage control, aiming to lull the population to sleep and prevent the manifesto from harming the interests of Spanish imperialism.

The main concern of the current investigation is that the revelation of broad support for fascism in the Spanish officer corps could undermine the shabby lie that wars in which Spain participates are disinterested acts of humanitarian benevolence.

The Defense Ministry’s statement on the investigation proclaims that it “will not allow the slightest shadow of a doubt [as to the] absolute commitment of all the men and women that make up the Spanish Armed Forces with its Constitution and with the values that in it are collected, whose defense they carry out with total dedication, not only in Spain, but in the missions that they develop abroad in the maintenance of peace and freedom.”

The responses of *Compromís*, the PSOE, and Podemos simply echo the positions of the military officers’ associations, which were the first to protest the pro-Francoite manifesto. *Asociación Foro Milicia y Democracia* (Militia and Democracy Forum) and *Asociación Unificada de Militares Españoles* (Unified Association of Spanish Military) urged the PSOE government to break its silence and publicly condemn the manifesto to defend the reputation of the army.

The day after Guijarro’s statement, a small group of 17 officers or their widows, including Podemos member and former Air Force General and Chief of the Defence Staff Julio Rodríguez, issued a brief statement attacking the manifesto. Declaring their “total rejection without any ambiguity of the statement of Francoite officers” and noting Franco’s role in leading “a bloody and genocidal coup against the legal and legitimate Second Spanish Republic,” they wrote: “We are not the bearers of a superior morality nor of any sacred historic inheritance. We are simply loyal to the national sovereignty of the Spanish people.”

Retired naval Captain Manuel Pardo de Donlebún said in a personal note in the statement that, “The 600 signatures do nothing more than to reveal to the entire Spanish people what has been obvious only to those who lived a military life, and what the public authorities have persisted in ignoring since the dictator’s death: the fascist mentality survives in military officialdom.”

Such remarks underscore the essential bankruptcy of the pseudo-left strategy of relying on factional warfare in the state machine and the security forces. Whatever individual dissident elements may emerge, as a body those forces are committed to defending the interests of Spanish imperialism. This includes the factions of the military and spy agencies that are actually inside Podemos itself.

The record of Rodríguez, currently the head of Podemos in the Madrid region, underscores the cynicism of Podemos and the statement. Under his leadership, the Spanish army participated in US-led neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rodríguez also played a major role in the 2011 NATO war on Libya. It resulted in over 30,000 deaths, a country in ruins and an ongoing civil war between the competing Islamist factions that NATO had supported.

In his autobiography *Mi patria es la gente* (*My Homeland is the People*, 2018), Rodríguez is very clear about the imperialist character of the war in Libya: “The reasons, they said, were humanitarian, but behind these good principles lay others not so noble.” He recalls a crisis meeting of the cabinet, which he attended, in which the then PSOE Minister of Industry, Miguel Sebastián, stressed Spain’s dependence on Libyan gas and oil in

discussions of war.

The various pseudo-left allies and satellites of Podemos, for their part, have kept silent. The party’s Pabloite *Anticapitalistas* faction has not released any statement on its website or even an article covering the affair on its online magazines Poder Popular and Viento Sur. Corriente Revolucionaria de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras (Workers’ Revolutionary Current), the Spanish section of the Morenoite Trotskyist Fraction—Fourth International (FT-CI), has not published a single article on the generals’ manifesto in its daily online publication *izquierdadiario.es*.

Revolutionary Left, the Spanish affiliate of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), which works in Podemos, have issued no statement of their own. They simply republished an article originally posted in the online daily Público by former Lieutenant Luis Gonzalo Segura. In his article, Segura, like AUME and Militia and Democracy Forum, criticizes fascist officers and calls for “modern” 21st century armed forces.

The inability of these petty-bourgeois groups to make even the most elementary warning about the implications of the generals’ statement underscores their own bankruptcy, and the fact that they are themselves barely disguised political satellites of Podemos.

The Francoite statement and the response of the pseudo-left groups provide their own vindication of fundamental conceptions of the ICFI. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a wide range of academics and intellectuals proclaimed that the epoch of revolution and counter-revolution, which had opened with the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the Russian Revolution of 1917, was over. Francis Fukuyama announced the “End of History.”

However, in the eighteenth year of the new century, the historical problems of the old century are erupting anew. The Stalinist dissolution of the USSR did not resolve the historic contradictions of capitalism that erupted into wars and revolution in the 20th century. Not only has history not ended, but the ruling class itself is now proclaiming that it has to return to its blackest chapters to suppress growing popular opposition.

It is a renewed vindication that Trotsky’s struggle to bring a revolutionary perspective to the struggles of the working class during the Spanish Civil War, against the Stalinists and centrists, continued in the 21st century by the ICFI’s struggle against the Stalinist and Pabloite forces inside Podemos.

The critical question today is the intersection of the radicalization of the working class, expressed in increasing levels of strikes, protests and rising interest in socialism provoked by deteriorating living standards and the extreme concentration of wealth, with a worked-out perspective for opposing the ruling classes’ drive to police-state rule and world war. This underscores the urgency to build a section of the ICFI in Spain, to link the growth of workers struggles to a socialist, internationalist and anti-imperialist political movement aiming at transferring state power to the working class.



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