

# Spain's ruling elite mourns former Socialist Party leader Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba

Alejandro López  
17 May 2019

The former leader of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and deputy prime minister in the government of Jose Luís Zapatero, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, died last Friday at the age of 67 after suffering a stroke. Rubalcaba's death has become the occasion for his universal glorification at the hands of the Spanish political establishment and media.

The pro-PSOE *El País* wrote that Rubalcaba possessed the "best characteristics of a public servant." *El Mundo* headlined its editorial "Rubalcaba, a life in the service of Spain." *El Español* described him as "one of the most important figures" in the post-Franco era. ABC linked him "to constitutional loyalty, statesmanship and national harmony."

Acting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) asserted that Rubalcaba's best "attribute" was statesmanship, adding: "Now, before time enlarges his figure even more, we can say that he occupies a place of honour in the history of Spain." Former right-wing Popular Party (PP) Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy called Rubalcaba "a statesman in Spain's most decisive moments."

All the major leaders of the pseudo-left Podemos party, including Pablo Iglesias, sent their condolences to Rubalcaba's immediate family and the "Socialist [i.e., PSOE] family."

The PP, PSOE, Podemos, United Left and Citizens suspended electoral activities for the local and regional electoral campaigns. The following day, party leaders, mayors, journalists, Royals and Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa visited the funeral chapel.

If Rubalcaba's death was transformed into such an occasion, it was because his career faithfully reflected the rightward evolution of the entire political establishment. In his social origins, pro-capitalist outlook and defence of murderous repression, he

epitomizes the qualities the Spanish and European ruling elite see as desirable in a politician amid the shift to authoritarian rule that has followed the police crackdown on the October 2017 Catalan independence referendum.

Rubalcaba was born in 1951 in Solares, Cantabria, to a privileged, conservative family. His father fought as an aviator under fascist General Francisco Franco during the Civil War. Soon after he was born, Rubalcaba's family moved to one of Madrid's wealthiest areas, the Salamanca district. He attended the Colegio del Pilar School, an elite school, which has produced many politicians, businessmen, diplomats and journalists during and after the Franco dictatorship, including former PP Prime Minister José María Aznar, former Foreign Affairs Minister and Secretary General of NATO Javier Solana and Juan Luis Cebrián, founder of *El País*.

Rubalcaba said he joined politics due to the Francoite police's torture and murder of student activist Enrique Ruano in 1969. "I will remember this episode all my life, for me it meant a before and after to the point that the death of Ruano led me to politics," he told *El Confidencial*. This did not prevent Rubalcaba from attending the 2012 funeral of Manuel Fraga, propaganda minister under Franco and founder of the PP, who led the disinformation campaign about Ruano's assassination in 1969.

Rubalcaba joined the PSOE in 1974, the year Felipe González ousted the old PSOE leadership amid revolutionary struggles in neighbouring Portugal. González's "young renovators," as they were known, received support from factions of the Francoite state who saw them as an instrument to suppress the growing radicalisation of the working class and preserve capitalist rule.

The PSOE received extensive financial support from the US State Department and Germany's Social Democratic Party via its Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which paid the PSOE for full-time staff, rent, training, conferences and González's trips around Europe. When the PSOE took office in 1982 under González, Rubalcaba rose to become education minister in 1992. The following year he was named minister for the prime minister's office and relations with Spain's houses of parliament.

During González's government, the PSOE emerged as the main party of bourgeois rule, with much of the capitalist oligarchy that emerged under Franco becoming adamant PSOE supporters. For 14 years, the PSOE carried out policies of austerity and war—destroying thousands of jobs, cutting wages and dismantling existing national regulations rooted in the autarkic character of the Franco regime. It led Spain into official membership in NATO, the European Union and talks setting up the euro currency.

Above all, Rubalcaba played a key role in covering up the state-sponsored Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL), i.e., death squads, that murdered a total of 29 people and left another 30 wounded, mostly linked to the Basque armed group ETA. The scandal implicated the Minister of Interior and top members of the PSOE government, including González himself. Rubalcaba infamously dismissed the GAL as “an invention of *El Mundo*,” the right-wing newspaper that exposed the scandal.

Rubalcaba played a major role in the next PSOE government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero from 2004 to 2011. As head of the PSOE in parliament and then of the Interior Ministry, he oversaw the PSOE's reactionary measures. These included the imposition of the largest austerity package since Franco's death, two labour reforms, pensions cuts and wage cuts on civil servants, and the sending of troops to break a wildcat strike by air traffic controllers in December 2010.

The policies led to the PSOE's defeat in the 2011 elections. Rubalcaba then succeeded Zapatero as general secretary before resigning in 2014 amidst the worst electoral results the PSOE ever obtained. He announced then he would leave politics and returned to his former job as a lecturer.

Rubalcaba also joined the editorial board of *El País*, where he supported the 2016 internal PSOE putsch that

ousted his successor, Sánchez, for opposing attempts to install a minority PP government. *El País* was the main mouthpiece of the campaign against Sánchez. As the WSWs noted, the putsch spearheaded by Rubalcaba's friend González “against Sánchez—worked out in backroom deals with big business, the intelligence services, and the Spanish right—is not an accident or a betrayal of the PSOE's principles. It is the expression of the PSOE's historic role over the last half century as an instrument of capitalist rule.”

Rubalcaba once again came to prominence in October 2017, defending King Felipe VI's speech hailing mass repression unleashed against peaceful voters and activists in the Catalan independence referendum that left over 1,000 injured.

Rubalcaba was a reactionary defender of Spanish imperialism. The fact that the entire ruling establishment, including Podemos, hails such a sinister PSOE bureaucrat points to the deep shift to the right that predominates throughout official politics, and the gulf separating them from workers. He is hailed as a model of what they all want to be: right-wing bureaucrats who effortlessly renounce whatever principles they ever had to line up behind state repression.

Millions of workers and youth look at the PSOE's record with disgust, however. On Sunday, thousands of supporters of the Basque team Real Sociedad yelled “Rubalcaba, murderer!” during the final match against Atlético de Madrid. This was barely reported in the press.



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