

Spain's University of Alicante censors scholarly articles on fascist repression

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In an unprecedented decision, the University of Alicante (UA) agreed to a request from a fascist lieutenant's son to censor scholarly articles linking his father to deadly repression at the time of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). This sets a dangerous precedent to censor academic research, opening the door to large-scale revision of the history of Spanish fascism.

Last week, the UA provisionally agreed to erase from two digital articles written by Professor Juan Antonio Ríos Carratalá the name of lieutenant Antonio Luis Baena Tocón, who participated in the fascist repression. Baena was secretary in the council of war that condemned to death the famous poet Miguel Hernández. Another article by Ríos Carratalá, "The Diego San José case, the shadow of Miguel Hernández and the humourist judge" was removed from the UA's Institutional Repository.

The fascist regime led by General Francisco Franco was one of Europe's most repressive regimes in the 20th century. More than 200,000 men and women were executed during the Civil War, and another 200,000 died in fascist concentration camps. Officially, 114,266 people are still classified as "disappeared", that is, their bodies were abandoned or buried by paramilitary units of the fascist Falange or by the military. Hundreds of thousands of others fled Spain and remained in exile until the fall of the dictatorship.

Hernández was a poet and playwright associated with the Generation of '27 movement and the Generation of '36 movement, and is recognised as one of great Spanish poets. During the Civil War, he campaigned against Franco's fascist forces, enrolling in the Communist Party-led Fifth Regiment, and joined the First Cavalry Company as a cultural-affairs officer, reading his poetry daily on the radio. He travelled extensively, organising cultural events and reading his

poetry at rallies and on the front lines to Republican forces fighting the fascists.

Hernández did not escape Spain after the Republican surrender to Franco in April 1939. He was arrested multiple times after the war for his anti-fascist sympathies. He was eventually sentenced to death as "an extremely dangerous and despicable element to all good Spaniards." Franco later commuted his sentence to 30 years in prison, to avoid making him an international martyr like Federico Garcia Lorca—the celebrated poet, playwright, and theatre director who was executed by fascist forces at the beginning of the civil war.

The harshness of his incarceration took its toll, however, and Hernández died of tuberculosis in 1942, at the age of 31.

According to Ríos Carratalá, Baena Tocón was a secondary figure in fascist repression, but supported it. Carratalá writes that Baena Tocón, "the person who could have told the specialists in the biography of Miguel Hernández so much, carried out an essential task during the postwar period, under the orders of the investigating judge: purging, emptying and eliminating the collection of republican press deposited in the library of Madrid. His objective was to search for 'crimes', whose consequences could be a death sentence."

Now, however, Antonio Luis Baena Tocón will only be linked with Hernández's death through his initials in Ríos Carratalá's articles. The fascist lieutenant's son complained to *El País*: "I have found various falsehoods about the way he was and acted ... They present him as an executioner, while he was another victim" of Franco.

This reactionary and anti-democratic ruling has the most far-reaching consequences. The fascists, Stalinists

and social democrats manufactured a “Pact of Forgetting” with Franco’s heirs as the Francoite regime fell in the 1970s, enshrined in the so-called Amnesty Law of 1977, which prevents anyone from being prosecuted for fascist repression. Now, amid a broad promotion of Francoism in the Spanish ruling elite, researchers are to be forbidden to identify the authors of its bloody crimes.

During the transition to parliamentary democracy, the aim of the Stalinists and social democrats in their backroom deals with the Francoite regime was to block a seizure of power by the working class and restabilise capitalism in the tumultuous period after Franco’s death in 1975.

Over 40 years later, after decades of increasing war since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a decade of draconian social austerity since the 2008 financial crisis, Spanish capitalism is in a deep crisis. Amid the discrediting of the post-Francoite Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Popular Party (PP) duopoly, police brutally cracked down on the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. The ruling elite was then promoting Vox, an explicitly pro-Francoite party linked to the army, granting it air time and allowing it to establish itself in mainstream politics.

As part and parcel of this offensive, the Spanish ruling class is now seeking to suppress the record of its bloody crimes under fascism in order to legitimise the resurgence of Spanish fascism.

The UA’s resolution comes just weeks after Spain’s Supreme Court issued a ruling endorsing Franco’s 1936 fascist coup. Claiming that the removal of Franco’s remains from the “Valley of the Fallen,” a state-run monument, would be “extraordinarily harmful” to the “public interest”, the court referred to Franco as “head of state from 1 October 1936 until his death in November 1975.” This unprecedented ruling implies that the state considers as legitimate Franco’s declaration that he was head of state, based on launching a fascist coup against an elected government.

The UA’s resolution is receiving growing opposition.

Ana Martínez Rus, Professor of Contemporary History at University Complutense of Madrid told eldiario.org: “I’m very angry ... [the resolution] questions our profession and is another obstacle to writing about the Franco regime.”

Enumerating everything that the resolution questions,

Martinez Rus lists “Freedom of teaching and expression, scientific rigor, historiographical practice, the right to information.” She added that it opens a precedent: “All of us can get involved in a lawsuit, and not only about the civil war, this can be extended to other times, everyone is a descendent from someone and has a surname. They do not want their names to appear as repressors, and we end up not knowing the magnitude. This opens the Pandora’s box, it leaves us helpless.”

Ismael Saz, professor at Valencia University, said the resolution is “academic censorship, one of the worst kind”. He added that “we work with people, not statues, with victims and repressors.”

Saz also linked the case to the Supreme Court’s recent endorsement of Franco, stating that “It comes just 10 days after the Supreme Court’s resolution recognising the dictator since ’36. ... Francoism continues to raise blisters because they won a war, lasted a lot, and during the Transition there was no break with it.”

The opposition to the censorship was also visible on Twitter. Hours after *El País* posted the story, tens of thousands of users repeated the name of Antonio Luis Baena Tocón, the name of the university or Miguel Hernández, making these terms the Trending Topic in Spain in the social network. Many Twitter users stressed that they did not want the name of Antonio Luis Baena Tocón to be forgotten.



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