

Podemos, Catalan nationalists cover up role of intelligence in Barcelona attack

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The exposure of the role of Spain's National Intelligence Centre (CNI) in the August 2017 Barcelona attacks is also unmasking the reactionary role of Podemos and the Catalan nationalists. They are covering up reports by news site *Público* that the CNI intensively monitored the Islamic State (IS) cell up to the day it carried out the August 2017 Barcelona attacks, and used the IS cell's leader, Abdelbaki Es Satty, as an informant.

The Spanish bourgeoisie is desperately trying to bury the story under a mountain of silence. Even as the news of the report rapidly spread on social media, the major media ignored its revelations. The established parties followed suit. The right-wing Popular Party (PP), which was in power during the 2017 attacks, has said nothing. The acting Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government has declared that former CNI director Félix Sanz Roldán already gave explanations in parliament on the CNI's relations with Es Satty.

In March 2018, both parties vetoed the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate the CNI's ties with Es Satty, instead letting Roldán speak to the State Secrets Commission behind closed doors. Roldán maintained that contact with Es Satty was made "following protocols" in 2014, when he was serving a sentence for drug trafficking. Roldán's appearance came several months after leaks confirmed that the CNI had contacted Es Satty. The CNI insisted that they never managed to make him an informant. *Público's* reports shatters this narrative.

All the more remarkable is the role played by the pseudo-left Podemos and the Catalan nationalists, who are providing political cover for the CNI despite mounting evidence of state criminality. The Catalan nationalists are requesting secret meetings with the government to get a few perfunctory closed-door

explanations—hoping to curb the scandal.

After *Público's* revelations, the Catalan regional government sent a letter to the Spanish government saying: "The Catalan Government, committed as always with the principle of maximum transparency and rigor in public explanations, is seeking a meeting with you, in any format you desire, to inform and provide explanations that you consider that serve to curb this situation and, as far as possible, end the social alarm generated."

The Catalan nationalists' reaction is all the more remarkable in that the Barcelona attacks happened as Madrid openly discussed imposing martial law to crush the Catalan independence referendum they were organising. Afterwards, the PP launched a savage police crackdown on the peaceful vote, suspended Catalonia's elected government, and jailed Catalan nationalist leaders.

The question remains as to whether sections of the state apparatus, seeking a pretext for a crackdown, sanctioned an attack to justify imposing martial law in Catalonia.

Podemos has remained silent, except for one cynical and perfunctory Tweet from Pablo Iglesias, its general secretary. In it, he criticized the "silence of the big media," asking "why PP, PSOE and Cs prevented parliament from investigating?" He added, "Why are you silent today?"

The question that deserves to be answered is why Podemos is silent on the *Público* report. It is not so difficult to see. Podemos is currently deep in talks with the PSOE to form a pro-austerity and militarist government, which would rest upon the CNI. The PSOE won 123 seats in the April election, short of an absolute majority in the 350-seat Congress. To successfully form a government, the PSOE needs

support from Podemos's 42 members of parliament.

At no point since *Público* posted the reports last Tuesday has Iglesias called for full disclosure on the Barcelona attacks from the PSOE in exchange for his support.

Instead, Iglesias has centred the talks on securing seats and posts in the state machine from the PSOE. Leaked information on the talks indicates that Iglesias has proposed former army general and Podemos member Julio Rodríguez, who commanded Spanish forces in the 2011 NATO war in Libya, for the post of CNI head after Roldán's resignation three weeks ago.

Iglesias has also never disclosed what former CNI director Roldán actually said in the State Secrets Commission in parliament last year. Iglesias's partner, and current second in command in Podemos, Irene Montero, attended that meeting. In fact, she had been approved last year by 304 votes of the 350-chamber parliament to enter the select club of lawmakers in the State Secrets Commission who have access to classified information, discuss secret state funding, and oversee the CNI. Its members are obliged to uphold strict confidentiality.

That is, Podemos works closely with the intelligence services through this commission, and its leadership was informed early on about the intrigues of the CNI but continues to hide it from the Spanish people.

Similarly, the Catalan nationalists also participated in the State Secrets Commission last year. Catalan nationalist lawmaker Jordi Xuclá absurdly praised Roldán, saying the information was "substantial and communicated everything in an absolutely constructive way."

The dismissive reaction of Iglesias to the damning exposés of *Público* is no accident. Podemos is an establishment party articulating the interests of an affluent middle-class milieu. It has repeatedly proven its willingness to implement harsh austerity and pro-militarist policies at the local and regional levels. As it seeks to enter a national government, it is desperate to prove its reliability to the state.

Podemos's reaction is a conscious effort to keep workers and youth in Spain and internationally from learning the truth about the intelligence agencies' role in the Barcelona attacks, in order to suppress growing opposition to war and attacks on democratic rights. They aim to lull the population to sleep despite

mounting social anger and political opposition across Europe.

Jaume Asens, spokesman for En Comú Podem (Podemos's Catalan affiliate), insisted *Público*'s report must be analysed "calmly and deeply." He added that readers should "avoid being tempted to make conspiracy readings."

This is absurd and reactionary, since what *Público* has revealed bears all the hallmarks of a genuine conspiracy, involving criminal behaviour at top levels of the Spanish state. The CNI monitored and carried out intensive surveillance of the cell up to the day of the attack itself on August 17, which left 21 dead and 130 wounded. Officials at CNI headquarters then tried to delete the file on Es Satty, as investigations began into the attack in which he played the leading role in preparing.

The reaction of Asens is all the more remarkable, in that he was the public lawyer of Mohammed Mrabet, who faced terror charges in Operation Chacal after the 2004 Al Qaeda bombings in Madrid. Asens is very well aware of the state's longstanding links to Es Satty, and the way in which top state officials lied to the public after the Barcelona attacks.

Mrabet was the ringleader of a terror cell in Vilanova i la Geltru, a town near Barcelona, that sought to recruit youth to go and fight in Iraq. One of his closest collaborators was Es Satty, who, according to *Público*'s report, was one of chief secret witnesses who worked with the police in the charges against Mrabet and the rest of the cell's members. What is unknown is if Es Satty was then, a decade before, a CNI informant.

It was the CNI that installed Es Satty, an Islamist well known to police and the intelligence services, in the main mosque of the small town of Ripoll, where he built his terror cell. The CNI also intervened to prevent Es Satty from being deported in 2014, by which point it had already recruited him as an informant.



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