

Scandal erupts over *Público* exposure of state complicity in Barcelona attack

Part III: The class issues posed by state foreknowledge of Islamist attacks

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The fact that the head of the Barcelona terror cell Abdelbaki Es-Satty was a Spanish National Intelligence Center (CNI) informant and *Público*'s revelation that the CNI monitored the cell until it carried out the attacks on 17 August 2017 come as a shock to many. The storm of protest on social media reflects widespread anger against politically criminal behavior on the part of the Spanish state. Predictably, broad sections of the media dismissed or downplayed the report and denounced all attempts to politically explain the revelations as “conspiracy theory.”

The issues posed to workers by official state foreknowledge of Islamist terror attacks in Europe cannot be understood in a national, ahistorical framework, as a question of whether or not there was a technical failure by the spy agencies. This is the framework of the author of the *Público* report, Carlos Enrique Bayo, who points to “the clear inefficiency, negligence and even recklessness of the CNI,” but fails to explore the significance of his own exposures.

The CNI's reactionary intrigues with the Es-Satty cell and the turn of the ruling class far to the right pose fundamental issues of historical and class perspective. They point to the premeditated character of the violently counter-revolutionary policy pursued the financial aristocracy against working people.

The Barcelona attacks were the product of the imperialist war drive that followed revolutionary uprisings of the working class against NATO-backed dictators in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011. The NATO powers, including Spain, armed Islamist proxy militias in wars first in Libya and, after the fall of the Libyan regime in August 2011, Syria. Islamist networks operated under official protection across Europe, recruiting thousands of people to fight in the Middle East.

At the time of the Barcelona attacks there was already mounting anger among workers over the war drive, and increasing concern in ruling circles over the potential for an eruption of popular outrage. The Spanish government called a “national unity march” shortly after the Barcelona attack. While 500,000 people turned out for the march, the event, contrary to Madrid's intentions, turned into a mass demonstration of public hostility to imperialist proxy wars in the Middle East.

Spanish King Felipe VI, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and other top officials present at the march were greeted with boos, honking car horns and shouts of “Your policies, our dead.” Workers denounced Spanish arms sales to Middle East countries like Saudi Arabia, shouting: “Felipe, if you want peace, you don't do weapons

trafficking.”

This eruption of working class anger after the Barcelona terror attack shows that more is involved in the *Público* report than questions about the CNI's detective work. The vicious campaign against *Público* this year in the bourgeois media—like the mass outpouring of popular anger just after the attack and the CNI's belated admission a few months later that Es-Satty was a CNI agent—reflects the explosive state of class relations. After a decade of European Union austerity and mounting social inequality, class conflict has reached explosive levels.

The eruption of mass strikes in Portugal and Poland, mass movements calling for the overthrow of military dictatorships in Algeria and Sudan, “yellow vest” protests in France and a global wave of strikes and protests from Hong Kong to teachers in the US are initial expressions of this. Events in Spain show how the financial aristocracy, isolated and deeply unpopular, moves rapidly towards fascistic-authoritarian rule. It is within this framework that the official response to the Barcelona attacks unfolded, and on the basis of which the working class must formulate its response.

The blood was still drying on the streets of Barcelona in August 2017 when the ruling elite began openly discussing deploying the army in Spain. Officials of the right-wing Rajoy government stated that they were considering imposing martial law. This would have been the first time the army was deployed in Spain since the country was ruled by Francisco Franco's fascist regime, which took power in the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War.

Shortly after, Madrid deployed thousands of paramilitary *Guardia Civil*, who assaulted peaceful voters in the October 2017 Catalan independence referendum, sending over 800 to hospital. While the referendum was itself a reactionary maneuver by pro-austerity Catalan nationalist parties to divert growing social anger along ethnic lines, it became the focus of a broader campaign by the bourgeoisie to set up a far-right regime targeting the entire working class.

Hysterical anti-Catalan agitation by the political establishment and media went hand-in-hand with the organizing of pro-Francoite demonstrations. The PP government suspended the elected Catalan government and jailed a dozen Catalan nationalist politicians on fraudulent charges. These politicians were then prosecuted by the new Socialist Party (PSOE) government, which let the pro-Francoite Vox party help prosecute Catalan nationalist politicians in a show trial that it oversaw.

The right-wing atmosphere stoked by the ruling class enabled an openly pro-fascist party, Vox, to be elected to parliament for the first time since the fall of the Francoite regime in 1978.

A few months later, the Supreme Court ruled that the coup launched by Franco and his henchmen in 1936 against the Spanish Republic was legal. It explicitly argued that Franco, the founder of a four-decade fascist dictatorship, was the country's legitimate head of state beginning immediately after his coup, which provoked the Spanish Civil War. After its victory in the Civil War, the Francoite army carried out the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of left-wing workers and youth.

The ruling is part of a broader move by the capitalist class across Europe to legitimise fascism. In Germany, the major bourgeois parties cover for far-right extremist professors like Jörg Baberowski while they whitewash Hitler's crimes in order to legitimize austerity and the re-militarization of German foreign policy. In Italy, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini defends fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. In France, President Macron hails as a great soldier the leader of France's Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, the mass murderer Philippe Pétain, while cracking down on "yellow vest" protesters.

It is only within this framework of a violent attack on democratic rights and the legitimization of fascism by the financial aristocracy that the CNI's intrigues with Es-Satty can be properly assessed.

There is no reason to accept claims from the spy agencies' defenders in the media that CNI operatives at most made a few mistakes in an otherwise sincere effort to protect the nation. They established ties to Islamist terrorists for the purposes of NATO's bloody foreign policy. After these networks carried out bloody terror attacks in Europe, the Spanish security apparatus backed the ruling elite by intensifying attacks on democratic rights.

This analysis is not based on speculation, or what the media call "conspiracy theories," concerning the state of mind or motivations of the CNI's operatives. Indeed, the motivations of the spies who worked with Es-Satty are unknown and have been covered up by the Spanish state and media. It is based rather on an objective review of the events of recent years.

Media claims that the Spanish spy agencies are acting in good faith have no credibility. If the Spanish state can juridically endorse Franco's record of fascist mass murder, it is by no means inconceivable that pro-Francoite elements in the state might allow an attack to proceed, at the comparatively small cost of a few dozen lives, in order to terrorize and disorient the public and help ram through unpopular, far-right policies.

The war crisis and the ruling elite's move to fascistic-authoritarian rule present enormous tasks and challenges to the working class. Events are exposing those pro-capitalist propagandists who claimed that the Stalinist regime's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 spelled the "End of History" and the final triumph of liberal capitalist democracy. Not only do the objective conditions that led to the Russian Revolution—war, capitalist crisis and international class struggle—still exist, the financial aristocracy is responding to the mounting crisis by turning back to the types of crimes it carried out in the 20th century. From within the bureaucracies of supposedly democratic capitalist states, a rapid drive towards dictatorship is developing.

The task posed to politically advanced workers in this situation is a return to the revolutionary traditions of the 20th century represented by the October revolution and the Trotskyist movement's struggle against Stalinism. These traditions are continued today only by the

International Committee of the Fourth International.

The way forward for workers and youth opposed to the bloody intrigues of the intelligence agencies is a fundamental political reorientation. It means building organizations of struggle in the working class internationally against the imperialist war drive and the rapid shift towards authoritarian forms of rule.

Above all, the working class needs its own revolutionary vanguard. Workers cannot simply, without their own party, spontaneously improvise opposition to the political provocations and propaganda of state agencies and official media. Relying on such improvisations instead of building a new vanguard means ceding the field of organized opposition to the Stalinist and Pabloite forces within Podemos and their petty-bourgeois periphery. However, these forces mount no opposition at all.

The leaders of Podemos were either silent or defended the intelligence agencies' role in the Barcelona attacks. This is the outcome of the counterrevolutionary trajectory, over an entire historic period, of the Stalinist and Pabloite tendencies that founded Podemos in 2014.

During the official Transition to bourgeois democracy after the death of Franco in 1975, the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE), the Pabloite Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) and the Catalan and Basque nationalists promoted illusions in the 1978 Constitution. They hailed the compromise between the Socialist Party (PSOE) and PCE with the Francoites, the Church and the Spanish army to "forgive and forget" the crimes of fascism. They claimed to be ushering Spain into a new era of democratic prosperity under the aegis of the EU. They then adapted to the Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and the ensuing shift of the European bourgeoisie towards policies of austerity and social counterrevolution.

Amid a new upsurge of class struggle after a decade of deep austerity in Europe since the 2008 Wall Street crash, it is obvious that fascistic politics have returned within the European bourgeoisie.

The layers of professors, media professionals and union bureaucrats represented by Podemos are deeply integrated into the capitalist state. After decades during which the PSOE served as the principal party of capitalist rule, establishing a record as a party of austerity and imperialist war, the Stalinist and Pabloite tendencies that founded Podemos abandoned any pretense of opposing the ruling elite.

The fundamental task posed by the Barcelona attacks is mobilizing the working class internationally and arming it with a perspective against war, nationalism and fascistic-authoritarian rule. This means first and foremost building sections of the ICFI in Spain and internationally.



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