

Spanish Supreme Court approves exhumation of fascist dictator Francisco Franco

Alejandro López
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On September 24, the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that the Spanish Socialist Party's (PSOE) exhumation of Francisco Franco from the "Valley of the Fallen" monument is legal. It ruled against Franco's family, which had challenged the move, and allowed Franco's remains to be removed in the weeks leading up to the November 11 national elections.

If since his death in 1975 Franco has remained in his state-funded mausoleum, built by the forced labor of left-wing prisoners, this is above all due to the reactionary role of the PSOE and the Stalinist and Pabloite forerunners of Podemos. Amid mass strikes and revolutionary struggles in Spain and across Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, they defended the capitalist state and blocked a struggle of the working class for power. They then set up a blanket amnesty for its fascist crimes. It still today blocks the prosecution of fascist torturers who persecuted left-wing opponents of the Franco regime in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, this ruling has led to endless self-congratulations in the ruling elite. At the UN, PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said: "We have symbolically closed the democratic circle, as the Supreme Court of Spain has just authorized the exhumation of the dictator Franco from the public mausoleum in which he was buried with state honors. Today we therefore close a dark chapter of our history." Spain's pro-PSOE daily, *El País*, said in an editorial that the ruling "opens the possibility of finally ending an incomprehensible anomaly in a democracy."

Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias called the ruling a "very important step" in redressing a "shame" maintained ever since the Transition to parliamentary rule in 1978. Calling it "a conquest that we owe to the relatives of the victims of the dictatorship," Iglesias added, "We will continue to fight for memory, truth and justice."

Despite the legitimate hatred that millions of workers in Spain and internationally feel for Franco, the fascist dictator and mass murderer, the exhumation ruling is a dangerous political fraud. The very forces exhuming Franco are at the same time working relentlessly to legitimize Francoism and

move back to authoritarian forms of rule.

Terrified of deepening social anger and political disaffection after decades of European Union (EU) austerity and NATO imperialist wars from Afghanistan to Libya, the Spanish ruling class has moved rapidly over the last two years to rehabilitate Franco and police state rule. A brutal police crackdown targeted the 1 October 2017 Catalan independence referendum. Since then, ruling parties in Madrid have pressed for far-reaching changes in Spanish political life to rehabilitate fascism and authoritarianism.

They encouraged protests at which Francoite anthems were sung, promoted the pro-Francoite Vox party and organized show trials of Catalan nationalist political prisoners. The Catalan issue became the main vehicle for shifting Spanish politics to the right and rehabilitating fascism. While polls have repeatedly shown that an overwhelming percentage of the population rejects confrontation between Madrid and Barcelona, the whole political establishment, from far-right Vox to the pseudo-left Podemos, supports authoritarian measures to crush the Catalan nationalists.

The universal character of the promotion of fascist historical figures amid the drive to militarist and authoritarian rule in Europe underscores the significance of these events. In France, President Emmanuel Macron has made statements extolling Vichy regime leader Philippe Pétain, while cracking down on "yellow vest" protests. In Germany, a renewed effort is underway, led by Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski, to whitewash the crimes of the Nazi regime. Far-right parties have been in government in Italy, Hungary, Poland, Austria and beyond.

The last 25 years have conclusively demonstrated that fascism, far from being an anomaly of the 20th century, is an inherent tendency in capitalism—rooted in the bourgeoisie's attempt to suppress the class struggle and opposition to austerity and war.

The hypocritical campaign in the political establishment to exhume Franco developed in parallel with these moves to promote fascistic traditions in Spain. In 2017, the Spanish

parliament approved a motion driven by the PSOE ordering the right-wing Popular Party (PP) Government to exhume Franco's remains. The PP, the descendant of the Francoist National Movement, decided not to block the motion, allowing the PSOE to play the "anti-fascism" card.

In June 2018, PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez was installed in government with the support of Podemos and the Catalan and Basque nationalists, under conditions of mounting social opposition to the PP government. A month later, the PSOE approved legal amendments to the Historical Memory Law to exhume the remains of Franco for reburial elsewhere.

At the time, the WSWs warned: "A PSOE government backed by Podemos will prove to be a bitter enemy of the working class, whatever symbolic 'anti-Franco' measures it adopts. Behind its bland insistence that the struggle against fascism is democratic, rather than a socialist struggle for power led by the working class, lie decades of counterrevolutionary Stalinist and Pabloite attacks against Trotskyism."

This was soon proven correct. The Podemos-backed PSOE government pursued right-wing policies: adopting austerity budgets for 2018 and 2019, funneling billions of euros to the army, and backing the show trial of Catalan nationalists. At the same time, it left untouched the anti-working class labour laws passed by the previous government and the PP's law on public security, known as the "gag law." This limits freedom of speech, prohibits mass gatherings and imposes fines for protesting and making comments on social media.

Neither did the coming to power of the PSOE, backed by Podemos, halt in the least the campaign by the Spanish ruling class to promote Franco. In this, the very same Supreme Court that has just authorized the exhumation of Franco played a central role.

In June, the court issued a stay of the exhumation, endorsing Franco's fascist coup and declaring him the legitimate head of state starting in 1936—immediately after his coup, which launched the Spanish Civil War. This ruling, which provoked stunned objections from historians, was a sign of the support for the fascist regime that exists throughout the upper reaches of the Spanish state. The PSOE and Podemos tacitly accepted this reactionary ruling.

The same court is also preparing to impose "exemplary" and "harsh" sentences on 12 Catalan nationalist leaders over their role in the failed independence referendum of October 2017. The leaders face trumped-up charges ranging from misuse of public funds to rebellion, which could entail up to 25 years in prison terms.

The Supreme Court's latest exhumation ruling aims to lull as many people as possible to sleep, to somewhat distance the PSOE from fascism and, above all, to obscure to the working class the very dangerous implications of the entire

ruling elite's drive to promote fascism.

In the past weeks, the PSOE has launched its most right-wing electoral campaign in modern history under the slogan "Now Spain." It has outbid right-wing parties like Citizens and the PP in anti-Catalan chauvinism, threatening to suspend the Catalan regional government and invoke the National Security Law, while launching "anti-terror" operations against Catalan nationalist activists and deploying thousands of police in the region.

In this campaign, Sánchez is using the exhumation of Franco to posture as a democrat, even as he builds a police state. In a meeting gathering thousands of PSOE members on the outskirts of Barcelona, Sánchez threatened the secessionists with Article 155 of the Spanish constitution allowing for the dissolution of regional governments, and said "the separatists say that Spain is a dictatorship. That's a lie. We have no political prisoners in Spain, and more so, we are going to exhume the remains of the dictator Franco and finish with the Valley of the Fallen mausoleum."

It would be a fatal error for workers in Spain and internationally to allow themselves to be lulled to sleep by empty propaganda measures like the Franco exhumation. The working class faces a political struggle against the re-imposition of authoritarian regimes across Europe. This task falls to the European and international working class, struggling against the maneuvers of the PSOE and Podemos based on the revolutionary socialist program advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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