

Retired Spanish officers appeal to the king to back a military coup

Alejandro López, Alex Lantier
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Over 100 retired high-ranking officers have written to King Felipe VI appealing to him, as leader of the Spanish Armed Forces, to act against the elected Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government. They accuse the government of treason and of threatening the survival of the Spanish nation.

There are no legal avenues for the king, who constitutionally needs the prime minister's support to dissolve the government, to act on these letters. It comes after the government obtained support of Catalan and Basque regionalist parties in parliament for its austerity budget, and the officers' letters denounce regional nationalism in Spain. However, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the greatest global economic collapse since the 1930s, and growing working class anger at "herd immunity" policies, it is clear that far more is involved than a dispute over this year's budget priorities.

The warning must be made: the PSOE-Podemos government has remained deafeningly silent on it, but what is being discussed is a coup to install a military dictatorship aimed against the working class.

The first letter, signed by 73 retired generals and colonels of the XXIII graduating class of the General Military Academy, warns of a serious risk to "national cohesion ... in its political, economic and social aspects." It blames "the social-communist government" for "the decomposition of national unity." It accuses the government of being "supported by pro-ETA [Euskadi Ta Askatasuna]" groups—referring to EH Bildu, a party linked to Basque nationalist group ETA's former political wing—and by Catalan "separatists." It ends by asserting support and loyalty to the King "in these difficult moments for our homeland."

The language echoes rhetoric of the fascist Vox party in parliament. In a failed no-confidence vote in October, Vox leader Santiago Abascal denounced "social-communists" 23 times in his speech.

Significantly, the letter was leaked to Spain's main social-democratic paper, *El País*, which selectively quoted from it

in a brief, 500-word article. The daily refused to publish the entire letter, even after other media reported it and dozens of *El País* readers wrote to urge its publication.

This comes days after a similar one was signed by 39 retired Air Force commanders from class XIX of the General Air Academy. One copy was sent to European Parliament President David Sassoli on November 3, and another to the king on November 10. Neither Sassoli nor Spain's Royal House informed the public. It was only on November 17, a week after the Royal House received it, that the far-right *OkDiario* reported this letter. Neither Sassoli nor the Royal House identified the authors, except for former general José Molina Zatarain, who asked to be named.

The signatories write: "We are deeply concerned, Your Majesty, that a government that swore or promised to comply with the Constitution is capable of attempting to breach its oath by promoting changes other than those established therein". They assert that the government is attacking the Spanish Monarchy, the Spanish language and the separation of powers, leading to the "annihilation of our democracy."

The signatories also state that they are "deeply disappointed and offended by relations between the Executive" and the Basque nationalists, who are "the heirs of terrorists."

For all these reasons, these officers write: "Your Majesty, these members of the XIX Class of the General Air Academy, today retired and proud of having served in multiple destinations with our Air Force, whom also, and in act of service, many gave their lives, want to be by your side so that you feel our sincere support and our deep loyalty."

These letters must be taken as a warning. The ruling class is terrified by rising anger, protests and strikes against "herd immunity" policies and multi-billion-euro bailouts for corporations and banks. The fact that neither the King nor the European Parliament publicly disavowed or even disclosed these letters shows that a break with democratic forms of rule is being considered at the highest levels of the European ruling class.

The officers signing these letters, who grew under General Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship, are appealing to the Spanish army's fascist traditions. The last time the army mounted a coup against what they claimed was a "social-communist" government was in 1936 against the Popular Front government. Led by Franco, the army waged a three-year civil war and carried out mass executions after the war to crush revolutionary working class struggles. The Franco regime would only collapse in 1978, amid an eruption of strikes and workers' protests.

The only high-ranking Spanish official to speak out on the issue was former PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who said the army officers' letter "deserves my reproach." Zapatero declared that anyone who "has exercised military responsibilities must be prudent when speaking out." Significantly, Zapatero compared the situation to the army crisis during his term in office, when high-ranking active-duty officers, including Lieutenant General of the Army José Mena Aguado, denounced in 2006 the adoption of the Catalan regional statute.

"That led to some actions. Some are known, others will become known over time. I know there was an attitude that was not appropriate for some military commanders in relation to the Statute," Zapatero said. He added that Defense Minister José Bono—who reported a decade later, in 2015, that Spain had been in a "pre-coup situation"—intervened "quickly" at the time.

Zapatero downplayed the military letters, however, attributing them to "exaggerated, unfounded and emotionally exciting speeches" in parliament. This apparently referred to Vox's denunciations of the supposedly "social-communist" character of the government. Zapatero indicated that the generals need not worry, as the PSOE-Podemos government's policies have nothing to do with communism: "There are too many false indications in the political debate. You have to evaluate policies by real events, not false indications."

This explanation, blaming the crisis purely on the psychology of the Spanish officer corps, is an absurd evasion. Amid a mounting radicalization in the working class and growing anger at the official handling of the pandemic, the financial aristocracy is breaking with democratic forms of rule. In America, Trump has refused to admit his election defeat and has appealed to fascist networks that attempted to assassinate his political adversaries, like Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer, while Democratic president-elect Joe Biden has said he will rely on the army to oust Trump.

In France, after calling for stepped-up repression of "yellow vest" protests, former armed forces chief of staff General Pierre de Villiers recently told the neo-fascist press,

amid mass protests against police brutality, that "the rule of law" should be subordinated to more "strategic thinking."

In Spain, the general staff is of course perfectly well aware that the PSOE-Podemos government has nothing to do with the October 1917 revolution or an international struggle for workers' power and socialism. For two years, the PSOE and Podemos have implemented social austerity, while showering the armed forces with billions of euros and the latest military hardware. The PSOE-Podemos government is currently sheltering notorious Venezuelan coup plotter Leopoldo López.

The generals are encouraged in their coup plotting by the predictably cowardly response of the PSOE-Podemos government. The Ministry of Defence said that it is not planning on opening an investigation, "because [the letter] was addressed to the King," according to *Diario16*. Spain's main public television, Televisión Española, tried to lull its audience to sleep, reporting that "sources from the Ministry of Defence said that the letter has not had any repercussions within the active armed forces."

The army is concerned not at the government, however, but at explosive opposition developing in the working class, on the left of the PSOE and Podemos. During the pandemic, the government, in alliance with the trade unions, has forced millions of workers back to work and children back to school, aiding the spread of the virus which has infected over 1.5 million people and left over 65,000 dead in Spain alone. It responded to opposition by banning demonstrations, deploying riot police, threatening to deploy the army, and intensifying surveillance of left-wing social media and web sites.

This underscores the necessity of mobilizing the working class, independently of all factions of the capitalist ruling elite, against the pandemic and the growing threat of police-military dictatorship.



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