Spanish courts escalate campaign to legitimise fascist Francoite dictatorship

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Political developments in Spain are moving in an increasingly dangerous direction. Eighty-five years after the 1936 fascist coup led by Generalissimo Francisco Franco started the three-year Spanish Civil War, in which the victory of Francoite forces backed by Hitler and Mussolini set up a dictatorship that lasted until 1978, Spanish courts are aggressively rehabilitating Francoism.

They have issued a spate of reactionary rulings, such as absolving a fascist leader's anti-Semitic statements and opposing the changing of street names honoring fascist military units and leaders. It comes after the Supreme Court endorsed Franco's 1936 coup, and the Constitutional Court ruled that Franco did not commit crimes against humanity during the war or his 40-year dictatorship.

Workers and youth internationally must be warned. If the crimes of fascism are being rehabilitated, it is because powerful sections of the ruling class are preparing to use ruthless and criminal methods against mass opposition to social inequality, austerity and murderous "herd immunity" policies.

Two weeks ago, a judge ruled that a leader of the fascist Falange, Isabel Peralta, did not "incite hatred" against Jews in a public speech earlier this year, widely condemned on social media, honouring the Blue Division. This was a 45,000-strong infantry division of fascist volunteers sent by Franco during World War II to support Nazi Germany's war of extermination against the Soviet Union.

Peralta, using the language which led to the extermination of European Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s, said, "[t]he enemy is always going to be the same albeit wearing different masks: the Jew." She added, "Because there is nothing that is more true than this statement: the Jew is to blame, the Jew is to blame, and the Blue Division fought for this." She hysterically denounced Marxism as "a Jewish invention to pit the workers against one another."

The judge defended Peralta and the fascist parties attending the gathering, saying that "no group that adheres to the publication of the referred speech is going to carry out any act of hostility or reflects their growing hatred or contempt for Jewish people."

Last week, the General Council of the Judiciary endorsed a resolution against the law passed by the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government to ban pro-Francoite foundations, such as the Francisco Franco National Foundation. According to the report, apologetics for Francoism "constitute the expression of ideas that, although contrary to the values proclaimed by the Constitution, are protected by freedom of expression."

While socialists oppose the outlawing of fascist organisations by the state—aware, as the 20th century has shown, that such state powers are then turned against the working class—the attempts of the General Council of the Judiciary to portray itself as a bastion of "freedom of speech" are ludicrous. Its courts regularly persecute singers and artists on terror charges or "insults against the Monarchy." Stalinist rapper Pablo Hasél remains in jail for tweets and songs against the king and police.

The ruling clearly aims to prevent any limitation to the rehabilitation of fascism and its policy of mass murder and repression. This goes hand in hand with courts intervening to prevent street name changes honoring fascism in Madrid. The Fallen of the Blue Division Street and General Millan Astray Street, named after one of Franco's chief henchmen and founder of the Spanish Legion, are to remain.

The judge said it is "non-compliant" that the previous pseudo-left Podemos-led city council wanted to change the street honoring the fascist general, as it cannot "unequivocally infer that Millán Astray participated in the military uprising, nor had any participation in the military actions during the Civil War, nor in the repression of the Dictatorship." On the Blue Division, the court declared that it "was formed in 1941 two years after the Civil War ended, therefore it does not enter the period of exaltation of the military uprising, nor of the civil war."

Soon after the ruling, the Madrid council, run by the right-wing Popular Party and backed by the fascist Vox party, announced it would install a 20-ton, six-meter statue in honor of the Spanish Legion.

Spain's fascist crimes, both abroad and against the working class at home, are unquestionably established and well-known internationally. Despite its attempts to enforce collective amnesia of its crimes, the Spanish ruling class, under both Franco and the current post-Franco regime, have had to face the fact that its crimes were recorded in countless ways—in tens of

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thousands of books, films, songs and artworks.

Astray's criminal record before, during and after the civil war are well known. Astray was known as the "glorious cripple" for his disfigured body injured in Spain's colonial wars in northern Morocco. He lost both his left arm and right eye.

He founded the Spanish Legion, which regularly decapitated the forces opposed to colonial rule in Morocco and had as its custom to put their enemies' heads on bayonets. On the eve of the Spanish Civil War, the Legion committed the brutal repression of the Asturian Commune in 1934, executing over 2,000 workers. During the war, it carried out the Badajoz massacre, where up to 4,000 workers and left-wing sympathisers were executed.

In 1936, Astray came back from a tour in Argentina and joined Franco, serving as the director of the Office of Radio, Press, and Propaganda. He is most widely remembered for screaming, "Death to the intellectuals" at the University of Salamanca against right-wing intellectual Miguel de Unamuno, who publicly criticised fascist extrajudicial murders. This scene is vividly captured in Alejandro Amenábar's 2019 film, *While at War*, seen by millions of viewers, where Astray is portrayed as what he was: a brutal fascist thug.

The Blue Division ruling ignores the fact, acknowledged even in high school textbooks, that the Blue Division was part of Franco's payback to Hitler for his support during the Spanish Civil War. It takes place just weeks before the 80th anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941 which left nearly 27 million Soviet dead. It is another affront against Moscow, aimed at inciting militarism and war, amid mounting NATO threats against nuclear-armed Russia and China.

The fact that the Spanish judiciary feels emboldened to rehabilitate Francoism points to enormous dangers confronting the working class. It speaks volumes about what Spain's ruling elite passes off as the "left"—principally, the petty-bourgeois Podemos party. The courts know Podemos will not mobilise any opposition to its rulings, as it is a tool of the ruling class, including of its re-legitimization of Francoism.

For over six months, the PSOE-Podemos has night and day covered for the stench of fascism emerging in the army, after groups of Francoite officers began writing letters to the king demanding he support them against the elected government last December. In WhatsApp chats leaked to the press, these officers hailed Franco's coup and called for the murder of "26 million people," their estimate of the number of left-wing voters and their families in Spain.

Then-Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias reacted by saying, "What these gentlemen say, at their age and already retired, in a chat with a few too many drinks, does not pose any threat."

The rehabilitation of fascism in Spain is an urgent warning to the working class internationally. As working class strikes and protests erupt against austerity and profits, and bailouts are prioritised over human life during the pandemic, discussions of fascist coups and mass killings are on the order of the day—particularly after former US President Donald Trump attempted a coup on January 6 to halt the certification of Joe Biden's election victory.

In Germany, right-wing extremist Professor Jörg Baberowski is being paraded across German universities to promote revisionist historiography, blaming the USSR for Nazi crimes and publicly rehabilitating Hitler as "not vicious." Neo-Nazi networks are rampant in the police and army, acknowledged to have assembled lists of politicians for execution by far-right death squads.

In France, President Emmanuel Macron hailed fascist dictator and Nazi collaborationist Philippe Pétain as a "great soldier" amid "yellow vest" protests against social inequality. Now, letters are being signed by retired generals and active-duty military personnel calling for a coup to launch mass repression against Muslims and France's working-class suburbs.

Opposing the ruling class's rehabilitation of fascism requires mobilizing the working class in political struggle, independently of the forces which claim to be "left," whether it is Podemos, the Left Party in Germany or the Unsubmissive France party. Throughout Europe, there is powerful opposition in the working class to fascism. In Spain, it is well within living memory of Spain's population.

This historically rooted opposition to fascism, however, must find expression with a worked-out perspective to oppose the ruling class's drive to war and fascistic rule. This requires the building of a movement in the working class. It underscores the urgency to build sections of the ICFI in Spain and around the world, to link the growth of workers' struggles to a socialist, internationalist and anti-imperialist political movement aimed at transferring state power to the working class.

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