

Spanish government to sue antiwar web site

By Vicky Short
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Javier Arenas, president of Spain's right-wing ruling People's Party (PP), has confirmed that his party's lawyers are to sue the antiwar web site "noalaguerra.org". The site published photographs of all 183 PP deputies under the headline "Asesinos" ("Assassins) against a montage of the heads of government in the US, Britain, Spain, Azores and Iraq.

The Spanish government of Jose Aznar is one of the main supporters of Washington, despite opinion polls registering nine out of ten Spaniards opposing the war against Iraq.

The legal threat came after the PP's official web site collapsed in the face of a "virtual bombardment" of tens of thousands of antiwar emails, following a call by *noalaguerra*. The action led to heated recriminations in Congress between the PP and the opposition parties. The antiwar web site, which publishes information and reports of mobilisations against the war on Iraq, is linked to by the Izquierda Unida (IU—United Left) an umbrella organisation of radical groups set up by the Communist Party of Spain.

The IU has been at pains to deny PP accusations that it is responsible for instigating the attack on its deputies and/or its web site. It quickly removed the link to *noalaguerra* and condemned the numerous attacks that have taken place on PP official building and PP private members houses in the last weeks with paint, eggs and other materials.

The IU's parliamentary spokesman, Felipe Alcaraz, has announced the party will ask Congress to investigate a video circulated by email to parliamentary groups, portraying the IU and the Socialist Party (PSOE) as supporters of Saddam Hussein. Alcaraz said that the company responsible for producing the video, Eslabón Perdido, is registered in the name of Miguel Angel Rodriguez, a former PP spokesman.

The parliamentary threats and counter threats reflect the growing political crisis within Spain. The PP is a

government under siege by its own people. Demonstrations and protests continue to be held, almost daily. On Sunday, March 30, 60,000 people marched to the military base of Rota near Cadiz in the south of Spain, demanding the government stop US military forces using the base.

The same day, thousands marched from Madrid to the military base of Torrejón de Ardoz, while in Zaragoza 5,000 demonstrated outside an air base near to the city chanting, "Close the base! End the war!" Scores of riot police vans and mounted police protected the bases against the demonstrators. Even so, in Valencia around 40 people calling themselves "civilian inspectors" managed to enter the NATO Betera compound and attempted to "find the presence of weapons of mass destruction".

University students continue to organise stoppages, marches, hunger strikes, occupations and sit-ins in the major cities.

In Barcelona on Wednesday, March 26, over 30,000 secondary education students protested government support for the war, blocking traffic for several hours. Students from the Lycee Francais, Barcelona University and the local polytechnic joined them. Demonstrations also took place in front of the PP headquarters, while in the evening a march in the Plaza de Catalonia attracted 10,000 people.

Chancellors from the Institute Joan Lluís Vives, which covers the 18 universities of Catalonia, Valencia, Balearic Islands, Andorra and Perpignan, have supported the student protests. On Friday, March 28, they issued a manifesto condemning the US-led war and urging students to continue staging protests. Decrying the attack on Iraq as "illegal and illegitimate", the chancellor of Barcelona University said, "We do not believe that the academic activities will be affected by the mobilisations, which we think are very formative and enriching for the students."

Artists staged numerous acts of dramatic protest against the war during International Theatre Day on March 27, and participated in demonstrations demanding Aznar's resignation. A public manifesto issued by Catalan artists insisted that culture has an "inescapable commitment to truth and justice". A concert entitled "Give peace a chance"—involving a variety of artists, actors and journalists—was held in Barcelona on March 30.

Also in Catalonia "Aturem la Guerra" (Stop the War) has set up polling stations in universities, colleges, factories, hospitals, markets and street corners in approximately 130 towns to "give people the opportunity to vote against the war that the government has refused to give them." In Madrid the previous week two million signatures opposing the war were handed in to the government offices.

Such massive popular opposition has meant the government has been unable to back up its verbal support for the attack on Iraq with the commitment of combat troops. Even the 900 troops sent for so-called "humanitarian purposes" has provoked outrage across the country.

With many deputies fearing an electoral disaster for the party in May's council elections, the strength of antiwar feeling is starting to create divisions within the PP. Last week former minister of Labour and Social Issues, Manuel Pimentel, resigned from the party. Twelve members in Córdoba resigned the party the following day in protest at the government's position.

In Morón de la Frontera, Seville—the site of a military base that is currently utilised by US forces—three councillors have resigned from the PP. Felipe López Rincón, Manuel López Zambrana, y Andrés Martín García-Rodríguez said they intended to stand as independents in the forthcoming council elections.

In Teruel, Aragón former PP mayor Luis Fernández announced his resignation from the PP, as did Francisco José Ramónora, councillor of Mora la Nova in Tarragona. In Montmeló, Barcelona, the only local PP councilor, Francisco Mariscal, resigned his post but has remained in the party—announcing he will stand as an independent in the elections—whilst in Ferrol, Galicia, councillor Ramón Cemalmor resigned his membership.

Félix Pastor Ridruejo, a member of the PP's Executive Committee, has criticised the party's support

for the war in an interview with the newspaper *Mundo*. The PP "has blown up in the air any idea of a moderate, humanitarian and Christian PP" with its pro-war stance, he said, adding that "in times like these one has no right to remain silent." Ridruejo is considered extremely influential within the PP and was key to the party's selection of Aznar for prime minister.

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