

Spanish government discusses extending scope of Anti-Terror Pact

By Paul Bond
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In opposition, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) provided invaluable service to the right-wing Popular Party (PP) government's suppression of democratic rights—under the cover of uniting against terrorism. In government, the PSOE is now seeking to extend that agreement still further.

As the Basque separatist group ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna—Basque Homeland and Freedom) has resumed its campaign of bombing tourist resorts, nationalist parties are busy asserting their credentials as reliable and responsible allies of the government in order to strengthen their regional authority. Though there are disagreements on how it is to be achieved, all parties are seeking to reach an agreement that would result in more draconian policing of the Spanish working class.

ETA detonated five bombs in the last week across Spain's northern coastline for the first time since February. In April, a poll had suggested that ETA's support was dwindling, with 84.2 percent of Spanish respondents and 71.4 percent of those polled in the Basque region rejecting the group. ETA has long targeted tourist resorts because of their significance to the Spanish economy. Their stated policy was that disrupting this vital economic sector would force Madrid to negotiate with them. This reactionary perspective has handed successive governments an opportunity to develop anti-democratic repressive measures.

In 2000, the PSOE signed up to the PP's Anti-Terrorist Pact. Whilst the Pact was ostensibly aimed at clamping down on ETA, it legitimised suppression of civil liberties and an extension of police powers. Under its guise, the PP had sought to criminalise any democratic debate on the issue of national autonomy in order to strengthen the apparatus

of the state.

The controversial preamble to the Pact made this clear, as it explicitly connected all forms of nationalist politics to terrorism. It talks, for example, of the "imposition" of self-determination with the aim of independence for the Basque region. The moderate Basque National Party (PNV), which has put forward several proposals in recent years to extend regional autonomy, points out that the preamble refers more often to them than it does to ETA.

Consequently, none of the moderate nationalist parties, many of which had offered vital assistance to the PP, could sign up to the Pact without losing support within their regions.

The Pact was only able to function with the bi-partisan support of the PSOE. Following the terror attacks in the US on September 11, 2001, then PP Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar aligned himself with President George W. Bush's "war on terror" in order to push through ever more anti-democratic legislation at home.

This determination to exploit ETA's campaign to justify his right-wing policies was a major contributory factor to the mass rejection of Aznar in the general elections in March. When it became known that Aznar was suppressing evidence of Al Qaeda's responsibility for the March 11 train bombings in Madrid, seeking instead to blame ETA, a mass upsurge of hostility swept the PSOE into government.

Whilst the incoming PSOE government made noises about reopening discussions with moderate nationalists, it rejected calls for the anti-terror measures contained in the Pact to be overturned. Instead the PSOE invited the PP to join discussions on the Pact's extension.

The Commission of Inquiry into the March 11 bombings in Madrid has offered an opportunity for the

minority parties to press for inclusion in the Anti-Terror Pact. Chunta Aragonesista deputy, Jose Antonio Labordela, spokesman for the mixed group of minority parties on the Commission, has stressed that any new anti-terror agreement must represent “all the political forces.” Jordi Jan’e of the Catalan nationalist Convergence and Union (CiU) called the existing pact “a great mistake” because it included only the PP and PSOE. He said that the CiU had not supported the pact because it had excluded the PNV.

The CiU lost votes at the last regional elections because of its years of support for the PP. The main beneficiary of this loss of support was the Catalan Republican Left (ERC). ERC spokesman Agusti Cerda commented: “Nationalists also want to contribute our vision and our solutions.”

Cerda criticised the Pact for having been arrived at between two parties, who then presented this as a consensus to minority parties in government. He pledged the ERC’s support to a new pact against “international terrorism.”

The main obstacle for all of the nationalist parties remains the preamble to the current pact. Jan’e has described its removal as the “basic premise” for any new agreement. Margarita Uria of the PNV called for a pact “open to all formations” by removing the current preamble, which is “clearly offensive” to the various nationalist formations.

Initially the PSOE had talked about a new pact to deal with “Islamic terrorism,” but it was not clear what this implied. This was clarified when the Minister of the Interior appeared before the Commission of Inquiry. He was not, he said, talking about extending the current pact, but about creating a new one dealing specifically with Islamic terrorists.

The PSOE is continuing its support for the PP’s political agenda. Mariano Rajoy, Aznar’s successor as head of the PP, stated in parliament that he would agree to no changes in the introduction to the 2000 Pact, but would only discuss its extension to cover international terrorism. The PP have also criticised attempts for the Commission to influence the existing Pact.

After his recent meeting with the King at the Marivent Palace, PSOE Prime Minister Zapatero made clear his support for the PP’s position. He praised the “solid unity” that currently exists in the Pact (i.e., between the PP and the PSOE). He said the

government was also looking to find ways of reaching agreement with all parliamentary forces on the question of international terrorism.

The PNV has been at the forefront of calls for one single, unified anti-terror pact. Margarita Uria called for “a single pact open to all formations,” while deputy Emilio Olabarria said that the fight against ETA did not require a fight against all nationalists, any more than the fight against Islamic terrorism meant criminalising Islam. He called for a single agreement.

The PNV’s calls are based on its position at the head of the regional government. It was critical of Aznar’s policies, which it said hindered the Basque police from fighting ETA. It’s concern is to reach an agreement that will strengthen the regional state apparatus.

Calling for a new agreement to be drawn up, PNV Congressional spokesman Joseba Erkoreka has said, “We need new tools to fight terrorism.” The ERC, who hold key positions in Catalonia, described a single pact as “reasonable.”

While the regionalist parties are seeking to exploit any anti-terror agreements to strengthen their own hand, Zapatero has made clear that he will not accommodate them too much. As he left the Marivent Palace he was asked about the proposals of Basque Prime Minister Juan Jose Ibarretxe for a popular consultation on Basque sovereignty. All of the autonomous governments, he said “including Ibarretxe’s” should ensure that its proposals respect the “constitutional framework and its precedents.”

The key role in squaring this circle is likely to be played by the Stalinist United Left (IU). Gaspar Llamazares of the IU said that it would not rule out any option, whether that meant replacing the current Pact or reaching a short-term compromise between it and a new agreement on Islamic terrorism.

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