

Spanish interior minister used state apparatus to topple opponents

By James Lerner
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Just five days prior to last Sunday's general elections, the Spanish online newspaper *publico.es*, began posting audio recordings of current Interior Minister Jorge Fernández Díaz conspiring against the political opponents of the ruling Popular Party (PP). They included a plan to topple Artur Mas, the head of the main pro-independence party of Catalonia, the CDC, and replace him with someone controlled by Madrid.

What are being called the "Fernándezgate" revelations show the deep degeneration of bourgeois democracy in Spain. The Spanish ruling class, presiding over rising inequality and poverty levels, relies more and more on anti-democratic methods in its internal factional warfare, and above all, against workers and youth.

The high-quality recordings, made in October 2014, document meetings between Fernández Díaz and a Catalan regional anti-corruption official, Daniel De Alfonso. They discuss ways to unearth real or alleged malfeasance on the part of officials in the Catalan pro-independence regional government and how best to use the information to damage them. This included selectively handing it to friendly journalists or to the public prosecutor if possible, in order to discredit these officials and thus weaken the drive for secession from Spain. They take pains to discuss ways to cover up their own role in leaking the information.

De Alfonso mentions a series of potential cases involving possible kickbacks or bribes relating to such Catalan officials and their families, but admits that the evidence is very weak or non-existent. When Fernández Díaz urges him to keep digging, De Alfonso demurs slightly, expressing fear of the consequences for himself and his family if information is published before he is able to complete his work and properly

cover his own tracks ("I'm Spanish first and foremost, but this can just destroy me, I have a family").

De Alfonso repeatedly pledges his loyalty to Díaz, and Díaz, for his part, assures De Alfonso that "President Rajoy is aware of what we are doing" and that having worked with Rajoy for many years, he knows that the president is a discreet man.

De Alfonso lays out in great detail his own efforts to prepare a coup against Mas. He describes his conversations with leading figures of the Catalan bourgeoisie, including Isidre Fainé, head of la Caixa, one of Spain's largest banks; José Luis Bonet, head of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce; and the late José Manuel Lara, head of the Spanish media empire Planeta. He also circulates around Catalan politicians in an effort to locate a potential CDC leader willing to pull the party back from its pro-independence course and smooth over relations with Madrid.

The new revelations give further credence to reports over recent years indicating that Díaz had set up a secret "patriotic" police unit to gather information, mix it with conjecture and unsupported claims, and hand over "reports" to friendly media outlets. The reports were then dressed up as the product of an internal police investigation, but with no letterhead or signature, thus allowing for plausible deniability.

Most of the reports, first against pro-independence Catalan figures and later against the pseudo-left Podemos, have been thrown out of court in the few cases where they did give rise to formal charges.

Every party, except the ruling PP, called for Díaz to immediately step down, or for Prime Minister Rajoy to sack him. However, the PP has closed ranks, saying the revelations are all part of a politically motivated attack on the party and Rajoy insisting, "Díaz will not resign." Díaz's own reaction has been to present

himself as the victim of a conspiracy, denounce the eavesdropping on his private conversations as the “methods of the mafia” and claim that the recordings were “biased” and have been taken “out of context.” He has launched an investigation to determine those responsible for making them.

The PP spokeswoman in the Madrid municipal government, Esperanza Aguirre, once touted as a replacement for Rajoy, has also stepped in, calling for the investigation and prosecution of those who made the recordings, *Público* and all the media that have repeated the accusations. Earlier this year, Aguirre herself was forced to resign as president of the PP in the Madrid region, following a string of corruption cases in the party under her leadership.

Last week, three days after the revelations, the judicial police visited *Público*’s main offices in Madrid and demanded the recordings be handed over. The anti-democratic character of the operation was quickly seen when the police admitted they hadn’t even sought a search warrant after a request from the outlet’s editors. The journalists refused to hand over the recordings.

It is still unknown how *Público*, a pro-Podemos and United Left publication, came by the recordings. In previous cases of a similar nature, it has been the main bourgeois publications that have received leaked information from internal state sources.

It cannot be ruled out that sections within the state security forces are the source of the leak. In recent years, these elements have expressed disgust at the ruling PP for damaging their reputation with leaks to the press, false accusations and sabotaging investigations.

At the same time, Podemos has intensified its efforts to cultivate close ties to the state security services and the army and recruited members from these organisations including a former chief of staff of the Spanish armed forces, civil guards (militarised police created in 1844 and dedicated to internal political and social repression), and judges. It has appealed to them directly with patriotic speeches and raising their demands, including budget and wage increases and better coordination between the various state security forces. During the negotiations that followed the December 20 elections, Podemos presented the Socialist Party (PSOE) with proposals to form a

coalition government in which Podemos would take control of the Ministry of Defence and the National Intelligence Centre (CNI).

The reaction of Podemos leaders to the “Fernándezgate” revelations has not been to warn about the profoundly anti-democratic history of the security forces, but to exploit the scandal to integrate themselves further into the bourgeois establishment and present themselves as reliable guarantors of the national interests.

In an interview in *Público*, the number-two Podemos election candidate in Cádiz, a former civil guard and spokesperson for the Unified Association of Civil Guards, attacked Díaz for “tainting” the image of the security forces, declaring that, instead, he “should be looking for money for all the police and civil guards to have anti-bullet proof vests, but he prefers to use the resources to investigate political rivals.”

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