

Spain's Supreme Court endorses 1936 fascist coup

By Alejandro López
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Spain's Supreme Court has issued a ruling endorsing the 1936 fascist coup led by Generalissimo Francisco Franco. It led to the three-year Spanish Civil War, in which the victory of Francoite forces backed by Hitler and Mussolini established a fascist dictatorship that lasted until 1978.

The Supreme Court handed down an injunction halting the acting Socialist Party (PSOE) government's plans to remove Franco's remains from a state-run mountaintop monument, the "Valley of the Fallen." It argued that removing Franco's remains to a less prominent location would be "extraordinarily harmful" not only to the general's family but to the "public interest." It added that the public interest required understanding the "significance of don Francisco Franco," don being an honorific prefix in Spanish.

Explaining why it had decided to suspend the planned exhumation to give Franco's family more time to appeal, the court referred to him as "head of state from 1 October 1936 until his death in November 1975." Court sources told media outlets who sought confirmation that there was no mistake in the document, and that the court has no intention to rectify the ruling.

Traditionally, Franco was treated as the head of state starting on 1 April 1939, amid his final victory in the civil war and the ensuing mass murder of his political opponents. The ruling's unprecedented wording signifies that Spain's highest court considers the proclamation of Franco as generalissimo and head of state by a gang of fascist generals and coup plotters on October 1, 1936 as legitimate. Mass opposition of millions of workers and peasants in the civil war and the ensuing four decades of the dictatorship would be illegitimate, even criminal.

Franco's proclamation came only months after his

July 17-18 coup against the elected Popular Front government and head of state Manuel Azaña. The resulting civil war shattered cities across Spain and led to the murder of 200,000 political oppositionists, left-wing intellectuals and militant workers, and the detention of 400,000 people in concentration camps. For four decades thereafter, the Francoite regime and its secret police arrested, tortured and killed thousands, outlawed strikes, political parties and trade unions, and censored newspapers and books.

In the international court of working class opinion, Franco was never accepted as head of state, despite his regime's savage repression. He was an odious and bloodstained criminal. The only powers to recognize Franco as "head of state" in October 1936 were fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, led by Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, respectively—along with the pope in the Vatican, which described the fascist uprising as a "crusade" against communism.

The fact that Spain's highest court publicly defends one of the most brutal counterrevolutions in the 20th century is a warning. After nearly three decades of increasing war and militarism since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a decade of deep austerity since the 2008 global economic crisis, ruling circles worldwide are again envisaging such policies.

The ruling class is reacting to the emergence of mass "yellow vest" protests in France, mass strikes in Portugal and Poland, and mass movements demanding the overthrow of military dictatorships in Algeria and Sudan with a sharp shift to the right.

The international character of the ruling elite's shift to the far right underscores its political significance. It is a warning to the working class. French President Emmanuel Macron has made statements extolling Vichy regime head Pétain, and a renewed effort, led by

Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski, is underway in Germany to whitewash the crimes of the Nazi regime. Far-right parties and politicians are already in government in Italy, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Brazil and beyond.

Terrified by growing anti-capitalist and socialist sentiment, the ruling class is reviving all the political filth of the 20th century. As the WSWS has repeatedly warned, fascism was not an accident of the 20th century, but the inevitable political outgrowth of capitalism. If Franco is rehabilitated, it is because powerful factions of the ruling class are again considering a break with legality and democratic forms of rule.

In Spain, a fascist party openly defending the legacy of Francoism, Vox, has entered parliament for the first time since the Franco era and is backing right-wing coalitions in regions and cities throughout Spain. Promoted in the media, it has recruited six former generals. Two signed the pro-Franco manifesto signed by over 1,000 officers, including 70 former generals and admirals, roughly one-third of the total active number of general officers in the Spanish armed forces.

The Supreme Court's endorsement of Francoism testifies to the criminalisation of the Spanish bourgeois state after the brutal crackdown on the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. The political establishment came out in favor of the brutal police crackdown and the ongoing show trial of Catalan bourgeois nationalists who organized it. This went hand in hand with the holding of pro-Francoite, anti-separatist rallies legitimating fascism and the Vox party.

The same court has denied the leader of the Catalan Republican Left, Oriol Junqueras—who is standing in the show trial—permission to leave prison to be sworn in as a member of European parliament. This strips the millions who voted for Junqueras of their vote, as Junqueras will not be able to assume his position as an MEP. This enjoys the full support of Brussels, and the acquiescence of the PSOE government and its ally, the pseudo-left Podemos party.

The only way to oppose the bourgeoisie's drive to rehabilitate fascism is to mobilize the working class in political struggle independently of these parties. There is powerful opposition in the working class to Francoism, which is well within living memory of Spain's population. But this historically-rooted

opposition to fascism finds no expression through Podemos or the PSOE. The only reason that the court feels free to announce its fascist colors is that popular opposition is suppressed by Podemos and its various pseudo-left allies.

Podemos is currently trying to form a pro-austerity and militarist coalition government with the PSOE, and reacted to the Supreme Court ruling with a few minor and impotent protests. Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias tweeted that the court's wording was "a real travesty". The leader of the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain, Alberto Garzon, said that it "says a lot, too much, about the high judicial bodies we have in this country."

The PSOE itself, which is running a caretaker government since last month's elections, has not commented on the ruling.

The fact that the ruling class itself hails Franco vindicates the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) defense of the heritage of Leon Trotsky, who fought the Stalinists and centrists to bring a revolutionary perspective to the struggles of the working class during the Spanish Civil War. The "Transition to Democracy" in Spain during the 1970s, hailed by the Stalinist and Pabloite forces that built Podemos, is proving to have been only a passing episode. Amid a new era of capitalist crisis, the European Union is again incubating fascist regimes.

The critical question today is the intersection of the radicalization of the working class with a worked-out perspective to oppose the ruling classes' drive to war and fascist rule. This requires the building of a revolutionary vanguard 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 aiming at transferring state power to the working class.

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