
Spain

When rule by press replaces rule of law

by Katharine Kanter

Some countries have no luck. Bounding out of the frying pan of *El País* (homosexuality, hallucinogenic drugs, polymorphous perversity, liberalism), Spain has dived into the fire of *El Mundo*, the Conservative Revolution, where everything except terrorism will be made illegal.

To make a long story short: Since October 1982, Spain has been ruled by the Socialist Party. Their economists are all classic Anglophile liberals, such as Luis Angel Rojo, governor of the Bank of Spain, and Miguel Boyer, the former finance minister, who slashed infrastructure budgets, closed steelworks and shipyards, played with derivatives, and made Madrid an open city for the big banks. To make things even stickier, these people, notably Boyer, upon coming to power also quickly acquired a taste for expensive women and still more costly villas. Virtually all the major State industries have been sold off. The National Institute of Industry, modelled on Enrico Mattei's IRI in Italy, was closed down this year, its various firms privatized. The result: Something like 25% of the population is now out of work (the official figures are 20%). And, most importantly, virtually no rain has fallen since 1986, save in the northernmost parts. Spain, owing to a zero budget for hydrologic infrastructure, is now undergoing no mere drought, but the worst shortage of water for drinking and irrigation in 2,000 years. Drinking water is being delivered by tanker to Mallorca and other coastal cities in the south. Heretofore one of the world's largest producers and exporters of soft fruits and vegetables, Spain is also about to disappear from the world's agricultural map.

The only thing the Socialists did not do, was to cut back or eliminate public services, such as health care, transportation, and social security. They have simply allowed them to degenerate into chaos. The Spanish population is fed up.

Smelling blood, enter the shark school of Conservative Revolutionaries. The former head of the Conservative Party, Manuel Fraga, once a minister under Francisco Franco, was dumped three years ago by his lot, because he was not committed to ramming through brutal austerity measures. He had also made public statements attacking the International Monetary Fund. Fraga was replaced by the young, manipulable but photogenic Manuel Aznar, of whose real views little is known save Thatcherite slogans in favor of cost-cutting.

Behind Aznar, and this is definitely not a point in his favor, stands Pedro J. Ramírez, formerly director of the newspaper group *Diario 16*, now defunct, presently director of the Madrid daily *El Mundo*, which is about 15% British-owned.

Ramírez's prominence in public life owes to his personal address book, bulging with contacts from the intelligence community. As he did with *Grupo 16*, Ramírez has turned *El Mundo* into a scandal sheet of the first order: What other Spanish journalist can boast of being able to get, straight from sources in military intelligence, printouts of private telephone conversations, taken from taps, of the highest officials in the land, including the king himself?

Ramírez, the darling of the British media, has been set the task of pulling down not only the Spanish government, but the entire Spanish security establishment. Over the last months, *El Mundo* has made it its business to bring out anything, no matter how petty, which might be blown up as a "corruption scandal" against the government.

The GAL affair

The latest, which reveals the true intent of those behind Ramírez, is the affair of the Anti-Terrorist Liberation Group (GAL). The GAL is not a figment of *El Mundo*'s imagination; it really existed. It was formed by a group of high-ranking police officers some time in the early 1980s, to physically eliminate or otherwise "take over" individual members of the terrorist group ETA. Why did the Spanish government give the green light to the operation? Because, like most heads of State, President Felipe González, particularly while the labile, evil François Mitterrand was President of France and George Bush was President of the U.S.A., did not feel strong enough to pull down single-handedly the octopus of world terrorism, run, at the time, as a kind of British-Soviet consortium. To do that, he would have to have been a great diplomatist, a great statesman, and a master of irregular warfare. This is clearly not the case. Therefore, the GAL.

Of course, killing off a terrorist here and there does not stop terrorism. There are always more where they came from. So, Ramírez had the Achilles' heel of the Spanish government staring him right in the face. In a country where salaries for the police are low, while the risk of terrorism is high, it was not too hard to get statements and documents from a number of security officials, claiming that they had proof that virtually every minister of the present or past Socialist governments, was "in" on the GAL. It became difficult to tell which came first: the indictments by the instructing magistrate, or the "leak" in *El Mundo*, that such and such a document existed, and "therefore" so and so would be indicted. Rafael Vera, former secretary of state for interior, was indicted and jailed. Julian Sancristóbal, former minister of interior, also. José Amedo, a high-level police official in the Basque Provinces, responsible allegedly for "direct action," also.

The head of the Basque Socialist Party, Ricardo Damborena García, who had been a close contact to the Interior Ministry, suddenly quit the Socialist Party a few months back, joined the Conservative Party, walked into a magistrate's office, and "spilled the beans" on his former friends in high places, who, he alleged, were on top of the GAL. Other police officials have done the same. Statements and documents which normally should be seen only by an instructing magistrate, in order that their publication before trial not influence public opinion and therefore the course of justice, suddenly turned up in *El Mundo*, such as papers which allegedly show that the CESID, military intelligence, informed González that the GAL was about to swing into action. These papers had been in the hands of CESID official Juan Alberto Perote. The very day Perote met in chambers with Judge Garzón, *El Mundo* went into print.

The latest object of *El Mundo*'s attention is José Cathala, who had been, in the 1980s, the head of the French anti-terrorism effort in southern France. He was the liaison to Spanish Interior Ministry officials on the Basque separatist ETA, and had led the bust of the "Sokoa" Cooperative, one of the largest arms caches ever found in France, in 1986. On Sept. 11, *El Mundo* claimed to have proof that Cathala had accepted millions in gratuities from the so-called "reserved fund" of the Spanish interior minister, for every successful anti-terror operation carried out in collaboration with the Spanish. On Sept. 12, Cathala told the press that he would sue *El Mundo*.

One should also take into account the fact that ETA, acting in the service of foreign powers, has killed over 1,000 people in the last decade. A great number of the attacks were blind terrorism, car bombs or grenades, in which dozens of passersby have been killed or maimed. The GAL is reported to have killed 28. Herri Batasuna, the electoral front of ETA, is now an extremely dangerous mass-based movement, able to bring 500,000 people out onto the streets in riots. Over the last months, there has been a sharp increase in violent street actions in the Basque Provinces, with gangs of masked youths smashing and looting shops, terrorizing private households, and wrecking State property, in rampages that last for hours.

Some observers have commented, that the Conservatives may well be secretly pushing the Basques' button, to show the electorate that the Socialist government can no longer uphold law and order. The object being, to get general elections set for March 1996. But the more the central government is shown to be impotent, the more centrifugal forces will take over, no matter who is in power.

Discrediting the political classes

Do Spaniards actually read the dozens of pages of scandal Ramírez offers? And what is Ramírez's real aim?

According to his own admission, the object is not only to bring down the Socialist government and ring in the Thatch-

erites. The object is, first, to utterly discredit the political classes of Spain. One should recall, that that is *exactly* the program of the Universal Fascists in Italy in the 1920s, and that is *exactly* how the Nazi Party proceeded against military or political leaders who would not knuckle under, in the 1930s: Press campaigns were run against them, alleging homosexuality or whatever, clearing the political arena for fascism. Second, to play upon the fears of a population which lived under dictatorship throughout the 20th century, by presenting their security forces as a gang of murderers and thieves.

Although the men at the top of the Interior Ministry may well be oily politicians, the same is not true of the Civil Guardsman or policeman on the street in the Basque Provinces. Hundreds of these people, who deserve the title of hero, have been shot in the war against terrorism, often, in the back. One victim was the head of the police in Bilbao, who was shot in the back of the head in April and has not come out of a coma. The attack came after he was recognized in the street by terrorists: Several newspapers had published photographs of him at a press conference, although they had been told not to do so.

But what is this to Pedro J. Ramírez, "Pedro Jota" as he affects to call himself? One of his recent "scoops" was the proof that a poster campaign of the 1980s, calling upon the Basque population to reject ETA, was paid for by "reserved funds" of the Interior Ministry.

In early September, Ramírez, on a trip to London, gave an interview most revealing of his true motives, to Selina Scott of NBC Superchannel. Scott told her credulous flock: "Here is Mr. Ramírez, a man who needs 24-hour-a-day protection, because he has brought to light the corruption of Felipe González. He is the most notable of newspaper directors of his generation."

González, said Ramírez, has, in the political sense, "blood on his hands. . . . Before the end of the month, the Supreme Court will decide whether González shall be tried or not. Spain must urgently turn the page on this phase of history. . . .

"I was put under pressure in 1987 not to continue the investigation on the GAL, and in particular, I recall a conversation with President González who told me: 'When they stop killing us, we will stop killing them, that's all we have to negotiate with ETA.' Now he denies it, but I will never forget that sentence in my life."

Scott asked him whether he were not very friendly with opposition leader Aznar. Ramírez replied, "I am also very friendly with the head of the Communist Party."

On Aug. 6, *El Mundo* published a full-page article accusing Lyndon LaRouche and associates of being behind the GAL, and of recruiting "professional assassins." At the time of writing, *El Mundo* has not yet published Mr. LaRouche's rectification, in pursuance of his legal right to reply, to slanders which tell more about the slanderer, than his victim.