

# Table of Contents

Pasalo â Pass It On . . . . . 1



# Pasalo â Pass It On

ByMute Editor

During the political fallout from the Madrid bombing, Spain's citizens faced an informatic coup from a government desperate to keep and extend its hold on power. But using organisational tools tested by the anti-globalisation movement, the effects of media manipulation and disinformation were reversed: Spain was no longer following the script. Mayo Fuster-Morell kept a diary of the remarkable events following the bombing

During the last three years, Spain has seen a powerful social mobilisation against globalisation. Out of this has grown a dissident, self-managed social network that, during 2003 and 2004, gathered to impede the war on Iraq and to stop the permanent global war. Aznar, Spain's Popular Party (PP) President had not listened to the 98 percent of the population opposed to the war, instead basing the country's foreign policy on his alliance with Bush. This brought the Spanish State into the Iraq war, in solidarity with the USA and the UK.

Aznar obtained significant domestic benefits from this strategy, namely the incorporation of the state's fight against ETA into the international 'War on Terror'. By demonising peripheral nationalisms and promoting Spanish nationalism, he justified a new raft of abusive anti-terrorist laws that led to the repression of the anti-globalisation and squat movements, explicitly linked to ETA. He also hoped to use the electorate's fear to reap an electoral harvest. A poll on 11 March, 2004 gave an absolute majority to the Popular Party at the general elections to take place three days following.

It seemed two processes were at play in the political field: on the one hand, the massive mobilisations of a growing, self-managed social web; on the other, imminent victory of the right at the ballot box.

Thursday, 11 March

13 bombs explode on three suburban trains. 200 people are killed and 1400 injured. The Spanish government accuses ETA, although neither the methods nor the materials are those used by the group. Elsewhere the possibility is raised that the attack could be linked to armed Islamic groups.

Many begin to look ahead from the immediate tragedy: will the bombing give a free ride to the Popular Party? If it were voted in again, the party would repress still further dissident social initiatives and continue the brutal curtailment of freedoms – in parallel with what happened in the USA after September 11th.

Friday, 12 March

The Spanish state continues to maintain that the attack is the work of ETA, despite the fact that the group has sent a communiqué denying its participation. The government calls a demonstration, 'For the Constitution, for the victims and against terrorism'. Seven million people turn out on the streets under the slogan. But reservations against the call are also expressed. In Madrid, banners reading 'Who did it?' and 'We want to know!' are seen. The conveners of the demo in Barcelona, representatives of the PP central government in Catalonia, have to abandon the occasion because of the participants' reprimands: 'Murderers, Murderers!'

The social web that mobilised against the war meet to issue a call to cacerolazos – pot-banging – for Saturday 13th.

Saturday, 13 March

The dead are ours, the wars are yours!  
PP murderers, Franco's sons.  
No to government disinformation!

It is the pre-election 'day of reflection', and no political expression is permitted. The Spanish government, however, continues to link ETA to the attack – despite the fact that the mass media of the world are now reporting the involvement of Islamic groups. The PP's strategy is to hide the truth about the attacks until after the elections. If people believe they were the work of ETA, then the PP will win with an absolute majority; if people think it is Al Qaida, PP will likely lose the absolute majority.

In other words, the PP is seeking to preserve the function ETA has served over the last years. To that end, it is attempting an informatic coup, ordering the transmission of only the official version of events whilst silencing 'problematic' journalists and the Intelligence Service, who have been supplying their own conclusions to the world media. In the Basque Country city of Pamplona, national police shoot a baker dead when he refuses to put up a poster accusing ETA in his bakery.

As well as fears over reprisals against extra-parliamentarian political activity and the erosion of public freedom, it is the fight against such disinformation that ultimately brings people to the streets. Informed by internet resources like Indymedia, as well as international and opposition medias, people use an SMS system to distribute the call to demonstrate: for each SMS received 10, 15 or 20 more are sent. Particularly in Madrid, messages cross through diverse social spheres: not just activist networks but families, workplaces and places of study.

In Barcelona, the cazuela pot-banging proves highly effective, a racket extending itself throughout the whole city, impossible to silence. The streets of Spain's cities fill with people of very different kinds, some crying, some expressing their indignation: 'Liars, murderers! Your war, our dead! We are not all here: 200 are missing! You have chauffeurs; we have suburban trains. The dead are not for use: stop the manipulation!' Everywhere the bleep of SMS messages announces the latest news, which spreads from mouth to mouth through the crowd. Still people are arriving with news of spontaneous gatherings in more and more cities and neighbourhoods. No flags, parties, leaders, organisers or orders: participation is horizontal, spontaneous and massive. The news arrives that two Hindus and three Moroccans have been arrested; a video is aired in which a group close to Al Qaida claims responsibility for the attack. The certainty of a PP victory by absolute majority seems shaken. But none of this is mentioned on the official TV stations or other official media. It is a surprise when Mariano Rajoy, a PP candidate, informs the country on television that the demos taking place are illegal, illegitimate and unconstitutional, accusing the Socialist Party (PSOE) of organising them.

Rajoy asks the Electoral Council, in charge of the electoral process, to suspend the elections, looking to win time in which to shore up his position. There are even those who claim – amongst them the film director Almodovar – that the government asked the King to declare a state of exception and commit a coup d'etat. The streets continue to fill with people, 35,000 in Madrid and 20,000 in Barcelona, until the early morning. Just a few hours before the opening of the Electoral Schools, the Electoral Council confirms that the elections will take place.

Sunday, 14 March

In a result that would have been unthinkable 24 hours before, the PP is defeated. After massive participation at the ballot box, it loses not only the absolute majority, but the entire election, to Zapata of the PSOE. The mobilisation of the usually abstemious left, afraid of the PP's neofranquismo, tips the balance to a majority for the PSOE. But the voters that save the Spanish state from the neo-Francoist dictatorship aren't in the mood for partying: a powerful desire for change has come over

them, which cannot stop at the temporary reform they have achieved. They know now that in 48 hours a people can overturn any government.

Mayo Fuster-Morell <mayonet AT gmx.net> is a member of the Infoespai collective in Barcelona