



Aznar: Bush's Best Friend in Continental Europe

By **Vicente Navarro**

According to President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld, the "new" Europe (as distinct from the "old") supports the impending U.S. intervention in Iraq. Bush's new Europe includes Spain, led by Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar - who has established a close alliance with Britain's Tony Blair and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi to act as a power group in the E.U. to support Bush's policies on Iraq.

What is quite remarkable in the reporting on this in the U.S. media is the lack of scrutiny of what type of party is governing Spain and who Aznar is. The founder and current president of the ruling party - the Spanish Popular Party - is Fraga Iribarne, who was minister of the interior in Franco's fascist regime. As minister, he was in charge of the regime's much-hated political police, established by the Gestapo in 1937 following General Franco's request to Hitler. Fraga not only has never denounced fascism but believes that the Franco regime (which assassinated 200,000 of its opponents after the civil war ended in 1939) was the best regime that Spain ever had.

Today, Fraga still publicly defends the Franco regime. And just two years ago, he wrote a very supportive introduction to the book *A Historical Lie Finally Denounced*, written by his colleague T. M. Bereiro, whose major theme of this book was a denial that the Holocaust ever occurred. Indeed, Bereiro writes, "The Nazi persecution of the Jews was a lie invented by Zionists, communists and the British and U.S. governments." Aznar has referred to Fraga as one of the greatest Spaniards of the 20th century.

Aznar himself is a son of a prominent Francoist family and during the fascist dictatorship was a member of the fascist party. When democracy was reestablished in Spain, Aznar advocated against approving the new Democratic Constitution. In the right-wing press, he once criticized the Basque town of Guernica (destroyed by Nazi aviation, as immortalized in the Picasso painting that carries its name) for renaming its main square: newly democratic municipality changed the name from Caudillo Franco's Square (the name every Spanish town had to give to its main square during the fascist regime) to Liberty Square. Aznar accused the Guernica municipality of revenge. He wanted the main square to retain Franco's name and Franco's statue. Aznar has never condemned or even criticized the Franco regime, and his cabinet also contains several ex-members of the fascist party - who also have never denounced that regime.

Aznar's government policies have included a broad program of privatization, defined even by *The Economist* as "the best example of clientelism and cronyism," installing his friends as the CEOs of the newly privatized industries. As for his fiscal policies, his primary contribution has been the stimulation of tax fraud (an endemic problem among the wealthy in Spain), reducing by 20% the funding of agencies responsible for investigating and correcting such fraud. His fiscal policies also have been enormously beneficial to the top 15% of the Spanish population, who have received 58% of all tax benefits flowing from the reforms. Aznar's main contribution

to the feminist cause has been an embarrassing interview in which he declared that what he admired most in men was their intelligence, and in women, their willingness to be women (that is, to play the traditional female role).

And what of Spain's support for military intervention in Iraq? Polls show that 92% of Spaniards are against it, and 82% would still oppose it even if the U.N. Security Council were to approve it. Bush and Powell are inaccurate in their statements about Spanish support for intervention in Iraq. It is not Spain, as part of a new Europe, that supports their interventionist policies. Rather, it is a Spanish government that represents the old, reactionary forces of Europe.