

The antiwar movement in Spain has been one of the most active

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In Europe, the mass antiwar protests have been very different in each country, depending on the involvement of the government in the war. In Great Britain, Spain and Italy the antiwar mobilisations have been very strong. At this moment, and after the withdrawal of the Spanish troops, the war is mainly a key issue for movements in Great Britain and Italy.

I think that the main challenges of the antiwar movement, at the European level, are, in the first place, to apply pressure to force the European countries involved in the occupation to withdraw from Iraq, specially in key countries like Great Britain and Italy. It's a key strategic issue to force every country to withdraw, one by one, from Iraq. In second place, it's very important to increase the co-ordination between European antiwar campaigns and to promote global days of action that make it possible to unite forces, such as the marches that took place on February 15th in 2003 and on March 20th in 2004. In this way, the international meeting in Beirut was a very important initiative because it provided the opportunity to agree a common agenda. The antiwar march that will take place in October during the next European Social Forum in London is going to be another key moment to gain international momentum again. In third place, it is fundamental to increase the contacts with the social movements that resist in Iraq. We have to work out international solidarity strategies. In fourth place, we have to promote and deepen the linkage between the occupation in Iraq, the genocide in Palestine, and the broader US imperialist strategy. We also have to link the anti-imperialist and antiwar struggle with the anti-globalization movement and the struggle against neoliberalism. Finally, as antiwar movements in Europe, we do not have to give support to the current project of the European Union (EU) and the EU Constitution as an alternative to American unilateralism. The EU Constitution promotes a Europe based on neoliberal policies. That's not the kind of Europe we want. At the military level, the EU project is subordinated to the United States and the NATO. But the alternative is not a stronger military Europe. We've to be against any European project whose main goal is to increase military expenditure, with or without the USA. The alternative to US imperialism is not the lesser evil of the current EU. We need to maintain our independence from the EU project and European governments.

The antiwar movement in Spain has been one of the most active. There are several reasons that explain this. One of them is the active involvement of the former Spanish prime minister, José M. Aznar, as a close ally of George W. Bush. The antiwar movement in Spain had a double goal: Stop the War and erode the Aznar government. "Stop the War, Aznar Resign" was one of the key slogans. In second place, during the two years prior to the war, since 2001, there had been a wide mobilisation against the policies implemented by the right wing Government and specially against Aznar himself. We had major specific protests by students, immigrants, environmentalists and trade unions, including a very successful general strike on 20th June 2002. The war came in a context of the erosion and increasing criticism of Aznar's government. In the same period, we had a big

development of the antiglobalisation movement in our country. The two major moments of the movement were, first, the campaign against the World Bank meeting in June 2001, which was finally cancelled because of the movement's pressure. And, second, the protests held in several major cities during the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in the first semester of 2002. During the opening Summit of the Presidency in Barcelona, on 16th March, 300,000 people went out onto the streets. And during the closing Summit of the Presidency in Seville, on 22nd June, 100,000 people marched in the city. Finally, another important reason that explains why the anti-war mobilisations in Spain have been so important is the strong antimilitarist tradition rooted in Spanish society and social movements since the 80s: first, against Spain joining NATO during the first half of the eighties, and then against conscription during the second half of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties.

Finally, I would like to point out the main stages of the antiwar movement in the Spanish State, specially in Barcelona. The Stop the War Platform in Barcelona was formally created during the 90's because of the conflict in Kosovo, but its roots go back to the first war in the Balkans in the early nineties. After the attacks of September 11th and the war in Afghanistan, the Platform began to expand and new actors joined it, specially when the plans to attack Iraq became public and evident. During the protests against the war in Iraq the Stop the War Platform in Barcelona became a very broad coalition. The core of the Platform was formed by groups coming from the antimilitarist and pacifist movement developed in the eighties and early nineties and groups linked to the antiglobalisation movement developed in recent years. The Platform is a very broad coalition including the left parties in the Catalan parliament (such as the Socialist Party -in opposition at that moment-, the Communist Party, the Greens and the leftwing nationalists) and even the right wing Catalan nationalist party (in power in the regional government at that time); Catholic groups, trade unions, squatters, anti-foreign debt networks, feminist groups, students, far-left parties... And same thing happened in other parts of the Spanish state, especially in Madrid, although in some places the coalition-building process was difficult and problematic, because of the tensions between the more militant sectors and the more moderate ones.

A second stage began with February 15th, with mass demonstrations all over Spain. Around five million people came out in several Spanish cities. In Barcelona, we had million people -the biggest demo in the history of the city. In Madrid they had million. From this moment, Barcelona, and all the cities in the Spanish State, exploded with thousands of activities: a "human chain" to stop the war; a massive NO WAR spelt out in people on a wide avenue in the city; "cacerolazos" -what they do in Argentina: banging pots and pans- every Wednesday night; rallies in public squares; etc. On March 20th, with the beginning of the war, students at the two main universities blocked the access roads and motorways into the city with demos and road blocks. There were protests all day. The next Saturday, March 22nd, (as in many places) we had a march with one million people. There the main slogan was "Stop the war: Aznar resign!". When the Americans went into Baghdad, the number of actions decreased. Some months later, as we realised the people in Iraq were resisting, the mobilisations began again, but not at the same mass level as the previous months.

A third stage of the movement began after March 11th with the terrorist attacks in Madrid, just 3 days before the general elections that were going to take place on March 14th. Those 3 days were crucial for the evolution of the internal political situation of the Spanish State and would also have important international consequences. The right-wing government, led by José Maria Aznar, began a campaign of mass misinformation and lies about the perpetrators of the attacks in an attempt to confuse public opinion. While most of the evidence pointed to the fact that Al Qaeda was behind the attacks, the Government insisted that the attacks were the work of the Basque group ETA. Aznar knew that if people thought Al Qaeda was behind the attacks, his party's chances of winning the elections in a couple of days would be zero. So the Government called for demonstrations to protest

against the terrorist attacks and condemn ETA. But those demos turned against the government because in most places, like Barcelona or Madrid, most of the demonstrators began to shout they wanted to know the truth about the attacks. Just the day before the elections, a day when political activity is not permitted in Spain, thousands of people in Madrid and Barcelona began to mass in front of the head offices of the Partido Popular, Aznar's party, shouting: " We want the truth. No manipulation!". The government, under pressure from public opinion, and after the detention of two Moroccan citizens linked to the attacks, had to recognise on the TV that the clues pointed to Al Qaeda. The day after that, the 14th, when evidence of government lies and manipulation was obvious to many people, the Socialist Party won the elections. During the months before that, the Socialist Party had criticised the war basically for electoral reasons and joined the movement. Once in power, Zapatero, the new prime minister, withdraw the Spanish troops from Iraq. He had no other option and he used the troop withdrawal to gain credibility and legitimise his new government. Later he decided to send some troops to Afghanistan and Haiti.

At the present moment, the antiwar movement in Spain is weakened because of the victory of the Socialist party. The reformist groups have left the Platform and the antiwar movement has lost momentum, even though the withdrawal of the troops was a very important victory. We are waiting for the calls to action we hope will come from Beirut to continue our struggle against Bush's war. Entry Filed under: cròniques. Etiquetes: antiguerra.

Esther Vivas, Stop the War Platform, Spain
