

# Spain: New documentary breaks silence on Franco-era cop's culture of torture

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**In his latest project, director Max Lemcke is giving back a voice to the victims of “Billy the Kid,” one of the dictatorship's most notorious police officer**



Speaking to the camera, each victim remembers the torture they were subjected to in the cells of the General Security police headquarters in Madrid's Puerta del Sol square, which was used as a [detention and torture center](#) under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

They recall each torture by name – the wheel, the operating room. But even more harrowing than their accounts of being physically and psychologically broken – in some cases before they were even 20 years old – are confessions from victims who disclosed the names of their accomplices and are still unable to forgive themselves 50 years on. All feel their voices have been unjustly silenced for the sake of a smooth transition from the Franco dictatorship to democracy.

This is the silence that the new documentary *Billy* by director Max Lemcke hopes to break. The film puts a spotlight on one of the dictatorship's most notorious police officers, [Antonio González Pacheco](#), better known by his nickname “Billy the Kid,” which he reportedly picked up because he had a habit of spinning his firearm on his finger in an intimidating manner.

González Pacheco worked as a police officer until 1982 and was awarded several medals both before and after the dictatorship

González Pacheco wasn't the only member of the police force [guilty of torture under Franco](#), but his sadism set him apart from the rest. He was also the torturer who best emerged from the Transition. He joined the force in 1971 as a deputy inspector and was placed in the Social Investigation Brigade, better known as the Social-Political Brigade. This body was tasked with investigating and repressing anti-Franco groups, who were largely communists.

González Pacheco quickly rose to become Commissioner Roberto Conesa's second-in-command in the Social-Political Brigade and remained in security services until 1982, long after Franco's death in 1975. This was despite the fact he was convicted of torturing journalist Paco Lobatón in 1974. Indeed, González Pacheco spent as much time working as a police officer under the Franco dictatorship as he did under democracy.

The documentary, which is co-produced by *CTXT* magazine and crowdfunded by 1,500 people,

features testimony from González Pacheco's many victims, most of whom belonged to [anti-Franco groups](#) such as the Revolutionary Antifascist Patriotic Front (FRAP), the First of October Antifascist Resistance Groups (Grapo), the Communist Party and the Revolutionary Communist League, as well as other leftist and student movements. One of the most painful accounts comes from FRAP member Josefa Rodríguez, whose activist name was "Asturias."

"At the end of their testimonies my hair felt like it was standing on end: such brave, strong and sweet people," says Lemcke, who has also directed *Mundo Fantástico* (or, Fantastic World) (2003), *Casual Day* (2007) and *Cinco Metros Cuadrados* (or, Five Meters Squared) (2011). "Not everyone agreed to participate - half a century later they are still not prepared to speak in front of the cameras, even though we only asked them to recall their lives and their feelings."

These victims are not only united by the torture they were subjected to at the hands of González Pacheco, who would kick them while making Bruce Lee-style noises, but also by the fact they were essentially forgotten by a country that "was pursuing a more than [questionable model of transition](#), according to the official line," says Lemcke.

This silence worked in González Pacheco's favor and he became involved in the state's so-called "dirty wars." He took responsibility for the "suicide" of Enrique Ruano. A student who, it was claimed, jumped from a balcony after being arrested by the police, Ruano was linked by several testimonies to the bombing of the Rolando cafeteria in 1974, which killed 13 and was blamed on ETA. The Basque terrorist group assumed responsibility for the attack in its internal magazine *Zutabe* in 2018. González Pacheco was also linked to the 1977 Atocha massacre on a labor lawyers' firm, which claimed the lives of five attorneys.

Let's not forget that Antonio González Pacheco died without being brought to justice -  
Director Max Lemcke

As a police officer, González Pacheco was [awarded various medals](#), both during and after the dictatorship, which he was only stripped of after his death. "Let's not forget that he died without being brought to justice," says Lemcke. "He was involved in the so-called 'dirty wars' and got away with it. Perhaps, as one testimony in the film points out, it was not so much about what González Pacheco feared from the state but what the state feared from the information gathered by González Pacheco. He was a proud servant of a repressive system."

*Billy* comes at an important time, not only because of the age of the victims but also because it is a relevant topic that has been swept aside by the [coronavirus pandemic](#), according to Lemcke. Some of the testimonies were filmed in person while others were recorded over Zoom during the strict spring lockdown in Spain. Both González Pacheco and one of his victims, José María "Chato" Galante, a political prisoner and human rights activist who was tortured up to four times at the end of Franco's regime, [died of Covid-19](#) during filming - Galante on April 27, just 11 days before González Pacheco. "With Chato, we had things we wanted to go back to," says Lemcke. "It's very cruel how fate linked them until their deaths, which occurred within a few days of each other. It was yin and yang, wasn't it? One of them fought to ensure that those events would not be forgotten, and the memory would be kept alive for everyone's sake, and the other was a man from an old system who lived quietly, knowing that he would escape without punishment under the new system."

During the documentary, Lemcke includes fictional images of William H. Bonney, the real Billy the Kid, who was a legendary outlaw from the United States. He also includes shots from *Siete Días de Enero* (or, Seven Days of January) (1979), a film by Juan Antonio Bardem, in which González Pacheco is portrayed as the Cisco Kid.

According to Lemcke, “Francoism is still alive because it accepted democracy in exchange for keeping its privileges.” Lemcke also points to the fact that nowadays some of the behavior and actions we see around us are the direct products of the dictatorship. “Our transition was not a role model,” he says. “As soon as you scratch the surface a little, the murders, the blood that was spilled due to the coalition between the forces of law and order and the extreme right are seen. If you reflect a little, you can see how the [1977 Amnesty Law](#), for example, whitewashes those years of lead, and increases the impotence of the victims, who have not even been honored today by the rest of Spanish society or its institutions.”

*English version by Heather Galloway.*

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## **Gregorio Belinchón**

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