

Shooting of Spanish politician used to justify Internet crackdown

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On May 12, the right-wing Popular Party (PP) leader of León City Council, Isabel Carrasco, was shot dead going to a meeting near her home. According to an Interior Ministry official, “Everything points to it being a personal act of vengeance unrelated to her public position.”

It is thought Carrasco was killed by María Montserrat González, whose daughter lost her job at Leon Council and was ordered to pay back €12,000 in overpaid wages. González said Carrasco “deserved to die” for what she had put her family through and that she would do it again “30,000 times over.”

Shortly after Carrasco’s killing, social networks including Twitter and Facebook were inundated with comments. Whilst most offered condolences to her family, a considerable number welcomed or justified her death.

Several young people have since been arrested and could face up to two years in prison for their comments. Typical is that of one 19-year old who allegedly messaged, “There are still a lot left to kill. You can call me radical, but that’s the way it is. We need more shots fired.”

In another message, a reference to executions during the Civil War, he declared, “One shot in the head and each of them in a mass grave. Like they did with my great-grandfather.”

In response to these outbursts PP government Interior Minister, Jorge Fernández Díaz, declared, in language reminiscent of the fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, “The Internet must be cleansed of undesirables ... Outside of democracy, there is only anarchy.”

He announced the creation of a commission to investigate new laws to control the Internet.

El País, which supports the opposition Socialist

Workers Party (PSOE), suggested that Spain’s penal code already had laws with “punishments that are sufficiently dissuasive” that could be applied to the Internet.

“The fact that such behaviour has not, until now, been the target of the authorities, apart from on a few rare occasions, has created a perception of impunity, which, in large part, has contributed to the spiral of deterioration in which we find ourselves,” the newspaper declared.

Joaquim Bosch, spokesman for Judges for Democracy, cautioned on the rush to censor the Internet saying, “There are comments on the Internet which can be considered unfortunate, a symptom of bad manners or in bad taste, but that doesn’t mean they should be met with a legal response.

“We need to differentiate between stupid comments where people are letting off steam and real threats,” Bosch added.

Bosch’s mild rebuke will go unheeded. Recent months have seen an increasing number of prosecutions launched against people who have posted politically naïve statements on social networks.

In February, Spain’s National Court sentenced Alba González Camacho, aged 21, to a one-year suspended prison sentence for “inciting terrorism” on Twitter after she offered to tattoo herself with the face of anyone who shot Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and Economy Minister Luis De Guindos. She also posted a photograph of 44 prisoners belonging to the now-defunct Maoist armed group GRAPO and called for their return saying “we need a cleansing of fascists urgently.”

González told the *New York Times*, “The truth is that I’m a very normal girl, who has never landed herself in any kind of problem ... I never imagined something like

that could happen to me because you find a lot of nonsense on the Internet, including worse than mine ...But it seems that here that the prosecution is only for those from one side—the fascists can say whatever they want, and nothing will ever happen to them.”

Her Twitter posts, she said, were to fight “a system in which a minority lives on the back of the death, misery and exploitation of a majority.”

In April, in a nationwide round-up dubbed “Operation Spider,” 21 people were arrested under anti-terrorist legislation for “glorifying terrorism in social networks” and for mocking terrorist victims. Police authorities say they are still looking for 200 more people.

One tweet had a photograph of Franco’s successor, Luis Carrero Blanco, who was assassinated in 1973 with the words, “I want to Flyyy” on it. Another had a map of the Basque Country with “independence” scrawled over it. One of those arrested, Aitor Martínez, was accused by the state-appointed attorney of “doing something,” which appeared to amount to no more than uploading a symbol of the Basque terrorist group ETA. Martínez told reporters that a girl, who was questioned before him, said that all she had done was to go to a Basque National Day rally.

The Civil Guard also posted a two-minute long video, modelled on anti-terror operation propaganda videos, which ignored the above and concentrated on the comments of one individual, including, “The best thing that could happen is that ETA take up arms again and eliminate the Popular Party with bombs and shots in the back of the neck.”

The hatred towards politicians and lack of sympathy towards Carrasco is the reflection of the huge social tensions in Spain. Some 26 percent of the population are unemployed—52 percent among youth—wages have been cut by an average of 10 percent and inequality is one of the highest in Europe. Furthermore, workers and youth have been politically disenfranchised with austerity measures being imposed by all parties at local, regional and national level.

The pseudo-left parties have channelled the mounting anger into a dead-end by blaming the economic crisis and the austerity measures solely on “neo-liberalism” and ignoring the systemic failure of the capitalist system.

Under these conditions, the ruling class is resorting to

openly authoritarian measures. The Carrasco murder is being used as a pretext to control the Internet and goes hand in hand with the prosecution of striking workers and the passing of the Citizens Law curtailing the right to protest and imposing heavy fines and imprisonment for “disobedience.”

A recent Amnesty International report “*Spain: The right to protest under threat*,” exposes the excessive force meted out by police during peaceful demonstrations and the incessant use of identity checks, harassment, and humiliation of protesters, particularly women, in an attempt to dissuade them from attending demonstrations in the future. It also shows the lack of impunity with which this repression is carried out and the determination of the Spanish government to strengthen repressive legislation.



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