

LETTER

THE LEGACY OF FRANCO

The ETA activist Inaki de Juana Chaos, who has served 20 years in prison for his part in ETA attacks resulting in the death of some 25 people, is close to death as a result of a hunger strike he has been on for over 3 months. He is only alive as a result of being force fed, but is not expected to live long. After he finished serving his sentence in 2004 and was due to be released, the Spanish authorities decided to bring further proceedings against him for 'threatening violence' in articles he wrote for a Basque newspaper. This is a tactic routinely used by the Spanish authorities against ETA prisoners who have finished serving their sentences. Pending the hearing of these proceedings De Juana remained in prison although he had served his term. At that time the right-wing conservative Partido Popular was in power. The court hearing, however, took place when the present (socialist) government was in office. The case based on these articles was so flimsy that in June 2006 the original judge, Santiago Pedraz, presumably no liberal, rejected it altogether. However, an appeal was launched by the Spanish authorities, egged on by the right wing, who mounted demonstrations of "Victims of Terrorism" to persuade the appeal court to reverse Pedraz's decision. This it did and decided to sentence him to a further 12 years, no less - such is 'freedom of speech' in 'democratic' Spain! Concerned that were de Juana to die, it would give a boost to ETA by providing them with a martyr who was undisputably denied his democratic rights by the Spanish authorities, a further appeal court decided on 13 February 2007 to reduce the sentence from 12 years to 3 years. Allowing for the 2 years he has already been held since his original sentence ended, de Juana would be freed a year from now. De Juana, however, vowed to continue his hunger strike until being accorded the immediate freedom to which he would have been entitled by right had the Spanish justice system not been perverted by pressure from right wingers..

ETA, and de Juana, have been anxious to pursue a peace process similar to that pursued by the British government with Sinn Fein. When the Spanish Socialist Party won the last Spanish general election, the new prime minister Zapatero announced that he was going to engage with ETA in a peace process in return for ETA declaring a truce. ETA kept to its side of the bargain, but the Spanish government proceeded to offer them nothing at all. The extra sentence handed out to de Juana was a slap in the face, and there were others. ETA then decided to slightly break the truce by letting off a bomb in a Madrid Airport car park - and gave plentiful warning so that the area might be cleared. In fact, the Spanish authorities did nothing to clear the car park and when the bomb went off, 2 Ecuadorians were killed. Zapatero then used this as an excuse to cave in to his parliamentary rivals from the conservative PP and 'admitted' it had been a mistake to negotiate with ETA! It would seem then that the entire Spanish political establishment is back behind the Francoite idea of trying to eliminate ETA by force — the only effect of which will be to perpetuate the idea that Basques are being treated unfairly and encourage young people to join ETA's resistance movement. Yet the Basques have seen most of their grievances repaired since Franco died - for instance they now enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy for the Basque region and all restrictions on using their own language were removed many years ago. Everybody in Spain, Basques and non-Basques, want to see an end to the Basque armed struggle, and serious negotiation of this question is long overdue. ETA is willing - the Spanish establishment, however, is not.

If the Basque struggle continues, and it does, it is mainly because of the fact that the Spanish establishment refuses to accept that their struggle was honourable and justified. It still treats ETA militants as terrorists and criminals, and thereby

perpetuates terrorist responses. The negotiations between ETA and the Spanish government will be about the latter recognising the legitimacy of ETA's struggle in the past and making amends for the way they were ruthlessly hunted down. It will be about recognising ETA's heroes. They will be negotiations to further reconciliation, rather than negotiations towards ending the occupation of the territory by a foreign power, as is the case in Ireland. However, in both Ireland and in Spain progress in the negotiations is being held back by a ruling class fearful—of allowing it to be seen that the use of armed force can be 'rewarded', as this is one lesson that no bourgeoisie ever wants its oppressed proletarian masses to learn. It remains to be seen how these dilemmas will be resolved.

Lalkar,
London