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Spanish state

Spain is in the hands of thieves

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No doubt. We are in the hands of thieves. The Barcenas, Pallerols, Crespo, Nóos and Mercurio cases, added to the Gürtel case, Millet, Champion, Pretoria and many others, show that those who have been giving us lessons of austerity have been benefitting: not only the bankers and businessmen but also, when the cameras have not focussed on them, the politicians, who have filled their pockets in order to live in opulence and extravagance. And at our expense.

Mayors, former ministers, regional leaders, senators, councillors, MPs... a total of more than 300 politicians are under investigation for corruption. And sleaze is present at all levels of public administration. And not only. Corruption looms, too, in the General Council of the Judiciary, including the governors of the Bank of Spain and the Royal Family. Here no one is exempt. And we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

The Valencia region and the Balearic Islands have the dubious honour of topping the ranking of corruption and cronyism, although territories such as Catalonia, Galicia, Madrid and Andalusia follow closely behind. In Valencia, nine members of the Popular Party are formally charged and former senior officials of the government of Francisco Camps, who, even The New York Times has compared with Silvio Berlusconi. In Baleares, there are almost a hundred defendants, between middling and top posts, for the most part from the last Popular Party administration of Jaume Matas, who, incidentally, has accumulated a total of a dozen cases of irregular funding, among others.

In Catalunya, corruption is widespread in both Convergència and Unió [the two parties of the coalition CiU backing recently re-elected Catalonia regional President Artur Mas]. Convergència, whose headquarters have been seized to cover the bail of 3.2 million euros for the diversion of funds from the Palau de la Música and [the alleged public bid rigging] for the ITV [vehicle inspection stations] by Convergència's general secretary, Oriol Pujol [son of former Catalan regional premier Jordi Pujol]. Furthermore, there's the case of the Catalan Health Institute, which forced its president Josep Prat to resign, and now the case of Xavier Crespo, Convergència deputy in parliament, presumed to be linked to a plot of laundering funds from the Russian mafia. The "very honourable" Jordi Pujol seems to be ignorant of this, and is promoting from his think tank a "code of ethics for professionals in politics," based on honesty and transparency. Another bad joke.

And so to Unió Democràtica de Catalunya, or Unió, which was convicted of misuse of 388,000 euros of European Union funds meant for jobless training programs between 1994 and 1999. That's case known as Pallerols. And that culminated, check this out, with an agreement between prosecutors, prosecution and defence to avoid prosecution, and a statement from, among others, the training chief Duran y Lleida, and a reduction in prison sentences to less than two years (initially the Court of Barcelona demanded 11 years!), thus avoiding jail. Justice?

Nor should we forget the "fake redundancies" plot in Andalusia, led by the Socialists, with about 70 defendants, including former senior regional government officials. Many, it seems, were the beneficiaries, for over at least ten years, of money from the Andalusian ERE redundancy scheme. It was a scandal that followed in the wake of a long history of corruption in socialist ranks since the days of Juan Guerra and Luís Roldán.

Having said this, most corruption cases occur locally. Today some 80 mayors and former mayors plus several dozen more councillors are under investigation for cases related to the awarding of contracts and urban development. Many of them are charged with crimes of embezzlement, breach of trust, influence peddling and / or fraud. The Pretoria [urban development] case in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, and the more recent case of "operation Mercurio" in Sabadell, are examples.

The major political parties in particular appear to have done what they wished with public funds, using them as illegal financing instruments and treating collective matters as if they were private. No wonder, then, that in the last Barometer Sociological Research Center (CIS), in December 2012, politicians and parties were considered the third most important problem that exists in the Spanish state, after corruption and fraud. In fact, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2012 report, the Spanish State was ranked 30th in the standings, tied, coincidentally, or maybe not, with Botswana.

Intimidating the media

And, what happens to those who dare to denounce corruption? Today the most emblematic case is that of *CafèambLlet*, a local magazine, with very little means, that reported in early 2102, with a home video, which within a few days was seen by over a hundred thousand visitors in Youtube, how Catalan public health money was being stolen by businessmen and politicians of CiU and Catalan Socialist Party (PSC).

Months later, *CafèambLlet* faced legal action by Josep Maria Via, quoted in that video, for allegedly attempting to bring him into disrepute, in an unusually fast trial in which they were not even allowed to speak, and were convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of ten thousand euros. But take note, another major scandal that was uncovered by *CafèambLlet* in its Crespo Report, regarding [the CiU's deputy] Xavier Crespo, who in turn threatened to sue the magazine and who at present the anti-corruption prosecutor has asked that he be investigated for graft and bribery. Will anyone compensate *CafèambLlet* for the threats received by this character?

Nature of today's corruption

Corruption is not perceived today as it was in the past. Now it is regarded as an intrinsic part of the crisis. The impunity enjoyed by political corruption seems to be over. At a time when the pillars that built the system during the Democratic Transition, and where there's a rapid loss of legitimacy of institutions and political representatives for their subservience to financial power, it is likely that the impact of corruption on public opinion and voting behavior will be more severe. And in so far as it increases unemployment, poverty and insecurity, illicit enrichment of the elites at the expense of the majority it is becoming an unbearable burden. The crisis is no longer seen as resulting from the 'waste' of the current people but as 'theft' and 'fraud' of the ruling class.

Now is therefore the time to act, say stop and take action: demand mechanisms of control over public officials, the revocation of mandates, the de-professionalisation of politics, the end to the accumulation of public posts, a limit on salaries, and transparency in accounts. Yesterday thousands of people gathered outside Popular Party headquarters in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza and La Coruña.

A first step in a new surge in the streets? The Barcenas case is the straw that breaks the camel's back. It is high time that they return all that they have stolen from us.

**Translated by Revolting Europe.*

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