

Show trial at the Spanish Special Court against the Basque organisation *Gestoras Pro Amnistía-Askatasuna*:

Lessons from the North of Ireland?

Does the Spanish Government really want to repeat the old mistakes of the British Government in the North of Ireland or rather learn from the Irish conflict resolution process? One of the lessons is, that a political conflict can only be resolved by negotiations of all parties involved. Oppression, exclusion and criminalization prolong the conflict. The aggressive violation of human and civil rights by the state strengthen solidarity and resistance of the people.

Uschi Grandel, 8. June 2008

The Spanish Special Court *Audiencia Nacional* in Madrid started a new mass trial on Monday, April 21, 2008. 27 men and women are charged because of their involvement - in some cases for decades - as activists within the structures of the Basque Movement *Gestoras Pro Amnistía-Askatasuna* (*Movement pro amnesty - freedom*). They are activists against State oppression, against torture, for solidarity with the many Basque political prisoners, who are dispersed in prisons throughout Spain.

Law of exception against Basque human rights activists

The activities of the Pro Amnesty Movement are well respected by human rights organisations in the Basque country as well as in Europe. "*Gestoras Pro Amnistía-Askatasuna* is not only known but held in high esteem", writes the editorial of the Basque newspaper GARA.



Court proceedings, Audiencia Nacional

The association „*European Democratic Lawyers (EDL)*“ demands the abolition of the exceptional court¹, which uses laws of exception to “*hollow out universal principles of law, basic guarantees and fundamental rights.*“

Their activities are open and transparent, ranging from organizing protests and supporting prisoners to compiling reports on oppression by the police and the courts of the Spanish and (to a lesser extend) the French state. All of their actions are conducted peacefully and publicly.

Like former Spanish Governments the Government lead by Zapatero pursues a policy of oppression, not of a resolution of the Basque conflict. But the conflict is far from only being a conflict between the Spanish military and police apparatus and ETA, the way, the rare media reports try to present it. Spanish nationalism faces a Basque Independence Movement which very vividly embraces all social, cultural and political areas of life and which is deeply rooted within the Basque society.

Spanish oppression in the Basque country doomed to failure!

The Spanish Government could learn a lesson from the conflict resolution process in the North of Ireland. The British Government's policy of criminalizing solidarity with prisoners, with victims of death squads, with victims of oppression was doomed to failure. They did not succeed in beating

¹ EDL: <http://www.aed-edl.net/> ; Statement in support of *Gestoras*: http://www.aeud.org/file/vasco/Mocion_33.01EN.pdf

people off the streets. They had to learn at the end that state oppression creates martyrs, that hundreds of political prisoners have thousands of family members and friends. 100.000 people followed the coffin of Bobby Sands, who died on hunger strike in 1981 in the fight for political status for political prisoners. Ten men died in 1981 in this protest against the British Government and smashed their policy of portraying the political conflict as a criminal conspiracy and thus isolating the political enemy by tagging them criminals.

Compassion and Solidarity prosecuted

There are more than 700 Basque political prisoners at the moment. These are higher numbers than at the end of the dictatorship of Franco in the late 70th. Since 1969 the number of political prisoners has not been that high.

Gestoras Pro Amnistía-Askatasuna is present in nearly every town or village in the Basque country. Their calls for action of solidarity and protest are answered by thousands of Basque people. Of course they are a thorn in the side of a policy of disenfranchisement and illegalizations. Since 2001 the activities of the movement are suspended, some of their best known spokespersons have already been in jail for years without a trial.



17.5.2008, Bilbao: more than 16.000 people show their solidarity with the 27 defendants

The trial, which started on Monday, April 21, 2008, is seen as a show trial by the defendants. In their opinion the verdict is already written. The prosecution demands ten years of prison for each one of them. They are accused of "*belonging to a terrorist organisation*". Alleged criminal actions are for example "*forms of struggle that complement those of ETA*" or "*taking advantage of the sensitivity caused by the supposed violation of the rights of ETA prisoners to induce volunteers and regenerate the operational structure of ETA*". The Spanish Government refuses to even release very ill prisoners. Where do they want to go by prosecuting compassion and solidarity?

Political Trials



Julen Arzuaga

"This type of political-judicial trials moves us further away from the aims we share with Basque society: ending the repression and seeking the definitive resolution of the Basque conflict."

writes Julen Arzuaga at the end of his report² "**33/01 Case against Gestoras Pro- Amnistía -Askatasuna**". He describes the trial, the accusations and the history of Gestoras. Julen Arzuaga is lawyer, coordinator of the human rights organisation **Behatokia** (<http://www.behatokia.info/>)

and himself one of the defendants in this show trial.

Not the solidarity work of *Gestoras Pro Amnistía*, this trial is a crime!

² Report: http://www.info-nordirland.de/euskalherria/eh_new_112_e.htm