



by Jean-Fabrice Vernet

Given the emphasis on leisure for foreigners on the Costa del Sol, it's easy to overlook the political aspects of Andalusian life. However, important issues are at stake which affect residing and visiting foreigners as well as the Spanish. In the first of a series of articles, we look at recent historical highlights, local institutions, key issues, and the upcoming elections. Follow-up reports will examine Andalusia's relationship to the European Union and other topics of importance to the foreign community.

Regionalism after Franco: Andalucía's newfound freedom and influence

Steeped in party politics, Andalucía's relationship to the national government in Madrid has been complex and controversial. To fully appreciate the Andalusian government's influence in both regional and national affairs, one must consider the fact that Spain has no overarching federal model such as those of Germany or the United States. In 1978, three years after Franco's death, a new national constitution came into effect which included provisions for devolution of powers to regions that corresponded roughly to Spain's old kingdoms. The negotiations that followed between the central government and the autonomous communities resulted in individual agreements that continue to be updated today as governments, budgets, and priorities change.

Having gained autonomy as a result of this

decentralisation, Andalucía also began to play a key role in national politics. Spain made its final break with the Franco era in 1982 by voting into power the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), and it was a lawyer from Sevilla by the name of Felipe González who became prime minister. During the socialists' 14-year tenure, the many fellow Andalusians that González had appointed into national office always kept their home region's interests in mind. An economic boom encouraged by Spain's joining of the European Community (EC) in 1986 strengthened the PSOE government in the early years. Good things came to an end for the socialists when a series of scandals and an economic slump in the early nineties helped the victory of the conservative Partido Popular (PP) in the 1996 national elections. José María Aznar became prime minister and was re-appointed when the PP won again in 2000.

At a regional level, the Andalusian

government was established in Sevilla in 1982, the year that the socialists took power in Madrid. Also dominated by the PSOE, the Junta de Andalucía collaborated with the national government to wipe out the region's notorious poverty through a series of successful social programmes. The building of new roads, the AVE high-speed train link from Madrid to Sevilla, the 1992 Expo world fair in Sevilla, and the growth of coastal tourism all contributed to increased international exposure for, and capital flow into, the area. Today, Andalucía is still poorer than the rest of Spain but the divide is much smaller, and narrowing.

In 1983, the Parliament in Sevilla proclaimed Blas Infante Pérez 'Father of the Andalusian Homeland'. The Casares-born activist was executed by a firing squad in 1936—the year that Franco emerged as leader of Nationalist Spain—for supporting Andalusian autonomy and advocating land reform. His execution came a month before a planned referendum on the question, but the referendum never took place and it would be another 45 years before Andalucía officially achieved autonomous status in October of 1981. Infante also denounced the treatment of women, Africans, and the *jornaleros*, the destitute agricultural day-workers who at the time formed the majority of Andalucía's population. Ironically, it was the often starving *jornaleros* who created a cold soup made of wild herbs and crushed bread which would eventually evolve into the delicacies known today as gazpacho and its richer variant, porra. Every year on 28 February, the remembrance of Infante's struggle is a major theme of the *Día de Andalucía* (Andalusia Day) celebrations.