



THE HURT OF HIPERCOR BARCELONA 1987

ENGLISH VERSION

ON 19 JUNE 1987, AT EIGHT MINUTES PAST FOUR IN THE AFTERNOON, A CAR BOMB WENT OFF ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE HIPERCOR DEPARTMENT STORE CAR PARK IN SANT ANDREU.

21 PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND 46 INJURED IN WHAT WAS THE MOST LETHAL ATTACK BY ETA.

IT IS NOW 30 YEARS SINCE THAT INDISCRIMINATE TERRORIST ACTION WHICH HURT BARCELONA.

TIMELINE

January – June 1987

(**16 January**) - ETA's Madrid commando is dismantled.

(**22 February**) - Argentina passes the Full Stop Law which closes criminal proceedings against people responsible for political repression.

(**12 March**) - Protests about deindustrialisation in Cantabria. Aceros y Forjas de Reinosa workers demonstrate against 500 dismissals. Police charges against the protesters lead to the death of one person and injure hundreds.

(**20 March**) - The United States authorises the use of Zidovudine to treat HIV patients. It is the first drug that prevents certain death due to HIV.

(**23 March**) - The motion of no confidence moved by Antonio Hernández Mancha (AP) against the Prime Minister of the Spanish Government, Felipe González (PSOE), is voted down.

(**27 March**) - An ETA car bomb attack in the Port of Barcelona. Civil Guard Antonio González Herrera dies.

(**2 April**) - An ETA car bomb attack at the junction of Vizcaya Street and Meridiana Avenue in Barcelona. Juan Fructuoso Gómez dies in it. He is the first civilian to be killed by the terrorist organisation in Catalonia.

(**9 April**) - An ETA car bomb attack at the Financia building between Pau Claris and Mallorca streets. No one is injured or killed.

(**10 June**) - Municipal and European elections. Pasqual Maragall wins the municipal ones in Barcelona. In the European ones Herri Batasuna, a far-left Basque nationalist political party, gets 39,692 votes in Catalonia, 13,631 of which are cast in Barcelona.

(**11 June**) - Margaret Thatcher wins her third and last General Election in the United Kingdom.

(**12 June**) - An ETA attack on the Enpetrol refinery in El Morell (Tarragona). About 20,000 Tarragona residents leave the city after an explosive device containing 54 kilos of ammonal goes off without any casualties.

(**12 June**) - At the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, President of the United States Ronald Reagan asks Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Wall.

HIPERCOR, MERIDIANA AVENUE

HIPERCOR IS AT 350-358, MERIDIANA AVENUE IN BARCELONA.



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EXPLOSION AND EVACUATION

4.08 pm

TRIBUTE

21 PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES AND 46 MORE WERE INJURED IN THE ATTACK.



THE RESPONSES

THE IMPACT

Barcelona came out onto the street. The first big attack by ETA hit the heart of society. Nearly 70,000 people demonstrated in Sant Andreu on Sunday, 21 June 1987. Between 300,000 and 500,000 people took to the streets in Barcelona on Monday, 22 June. In many companies there were five-minute work stoppages.

Shouts at the demonstrations calling for the death penalty created a storm of controversy as the main civic, social and political associations criticised the idea. A few days later, the Cathedral hosted the mass institutional funeral for the 21 fatalities.

THE CONDEMNATION

For the first time the *abertzale* (Basque radical nationalist) sector criticised ETA's actions and it was initially forced to describe the attack as a "serious mistake". Employers' association Fomento del Trabajo published a statement in the newspapers in which it proposed using swift methods to put an end to the terrorists.

In editorials, opinion pieces and cartoons the print media expressed their astonishment at the events and criticised Herri Batasuna's failure to condemn them and also Fomento del Trabajo's statement and the calls for the death penalty.

THE REACTIONS

On 30 September 1987, Santiago Arróspide Sarasola, alias *Santi Potros*, leader of ETA's commandos and seen as the man who gave the green light for the Hipercor attack, was arrested by the French police. In the international arena, ETA was losing the sheen of likeability it had gained during the Franco regime and cooperation between the French and Spanish police was stepped up.

The attack rocked the political landscape. On 5 November 1987, practically all the parliamentary parties signed the Madrid agreement on terrorism. Shortly afterwards, on 12 January 1988 the Ajuria Enea pact was signed in the Basque Country. Both agreements urged the Basque Government to lead the process of ending violence, rejected anti-terrorist legislation, stressed the importance of police action in the fight against ETA and underlined the value of democratic ways of addressing terrorism.

The attack also had an impact on ETA's surroundings. Herri Batasuna was the exception to the unanimity produced by the abovementioned agreements. Public criticism of the Hipercor massacre led to disagreements in and expulsions from Herri Batasuna and changes in the editorial boards of the *abertzale* daily press.

COURT SENTENCES

WHAT WAS THE BOMB LIKE?

"[...] they used [...] thirty kilos of ammonal [...] to which they added a hundred litres of petrol and an indeterminate quantity of glue and soap flakes, the whole explosive charge weighing 200 kilograms in total, which they put in plastic drums. They decided to operate it by means of a timer and put it in the boot of the Ford Sierra 2.3 diesel car [...]."

National Court judgement no. 32/2003

THE THREE WARNINGS

"[...] just before three o'clock in the afternoon, one of the members of the group made three calls from public telephone booths giving a warning in the name of ETA that there would be a bomb explosion in the department store between 3.30 and 3.40 pm. These calls were made to the Barcelona police, "Hipercor" and the newspaper "Avui", a call that was reported to the "Mossos d'Esquadra" Catalan regional police, who in turn reported it, at three thirty, to the Public Safety Board."

National Court judgement no. 32/2003

IT WASN'T EVACUATED

"We have said that the defendant administration claims the police services did a good job on the day and in the place of the attack, but the reality of the case and which is apparent from public court documents stands very much in contradiction to this argument. Indeed, given that the Barcelona fire brigade considers the premises can be evacuated in 10 minutes, it is true that between the arrival of the police (3.28 pm) and the explosion (4.08 pm) absolutely nothing was done to try to evacuate the building and prevent the public and vehicles from continuing to enter and leave it. Furthermore, as

the approximate time of the explosion had been set at between 3.30 and 3.40 pm in the telephone calls made one hour beforehand to the Barcelona police, Hipercor and the newspaper AVUI, when this time had passed one of the two police officers returned to normal duty and another one remained 'just in case'. However, at no time was there any further investigation other than the search that Hipercor's management said it had entrusted to its security guards, without dogs or detection equipment, and the police agreed to this because according to the judgement of the National Court which tried the perpetrator commando, 'evacuation was not considered convenient or feasible', and, we would emphasise, according to the evidence of the police it was thought that it was a false alarm because the time stated in the warning had passed. In this analysis of the facts it might be argued that 'maybe' the incident would have produced the same devastation, but the fact is that nothing was done, that in practice there would have been enough time to prevent the consequences or at least lessen them, and that therefore we might not be talking about the administration's financial liability. We are not saying that the police did not do what they had to do correctly; rather they simply did nothing in submission to business interests which may be very defensible but not at any price in human lives. The administration cannot be blamed for the damage caused by a terrorist attack? That is not an axiom with absolute value because it is possible that on some occasions, such as this one, maybe it could not have prevented the act itself but it could have prevented its consequences in whole or in part by exercising due diligence in each case, and if the act still takes place we would then be looking at another channel of redress."

National Court judgement no. 10/1994

DEADLY DARKNESS

"At four ten in the afternoon the timer attached to the explosive caused it to go off and ignite, which also spread from the second underground floor on which the car was parked to the first underground floor where the food department was, and a fireball burned the people it encountered while simultaneously producing a huge quantity of toxic gases which led to the suffocation of people who were within its radius of action. Several people were appallingly burned and maimed with no possibility of escape from the darkness produced by the black smoke and with the incendiary materials attached to their bodies, as the composition of the explosive caused the incendiary parts to adhere to bodies with no possibility of removing them or putting them out, since their self-combustion occurred without needing to use oxygen in the atmosphere."

National Court judgement no. 49/1989

SENTENCES

"The court finds the defendants Josefa-Mercedes ERNAGA ESNOZ and Domingo TROITIÑO ARRANZ guilty as the perpetrators of twenty one crimes of murder aggravated by the use of explosives and with the concurrence of the further aggravating circumstance of premeditation, and sentences each of them to THIRTY YEARS' IMPRISONMENT for each one of the crimes.

"As perpetrators of five crimes of injury with loss of a main body part or organ, with the concurrence of the aggravating circumstance of premeditation, the court sentences each of them to SIX YEARS' IMPRISONMENT for each of the crimes.

"As perpetrators of seventeen crimes of injury with deformity, loss of a non-main body part or organ or need for medical care for more than ninety days, with the concurrence of the aggravating circumstance of premeditation, the court sentences each of them to FIVE YEARS' IMPRISONMENT for each of the crimes.

"As perpetrators of seven crimes of injury which required medical care for more than thirty days and the existence of the aggravating circumstance of premeditation, the court sentences each of them to FOUR YEARS and SIX MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT for each of the crimes.

"As perpetrators of three crimes of injury which required medical care or left the victim unable to work for more than a fortnight, with the concurrence of the aggravating circumstance of premeditation, the court sentences each of the defendants to SIX MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT for each of the crimes.

"As perpetrators of thirteen crimes of injury, the court sentences each of them to THIRTY DAYS' IMPRISONMENT for each of the crimes.

"As perpetrators of one crime of causing enormous damage and endangering public safety, the court sentences each of the accused to FIFTEEN YEARS' IMPRISONMENT.

"In addition, both defendants are prohibited from returning to Barcelona for a period of six years which will begin from the time when they have served their sentences.

[..]

National Court judgement no. 49/1989

"The court finds the defendants Santiago ARRÓSPIDE SARASOLA and Rafael CARIDE SIMÓN, (...), guilty as the perpetrators of:

"- Twenty-one crimes of murder, aggravated by the use of explosives, defined above, and sentences each of them to thirty years' imprisonment for each one of the crimes.

"- Five crimes of serious injury, already defined, and sentences each of them to six years' imprisonment for each one of the crimes.

"- Seventeen crimes of serious injury, also defined, and sentences each of them to five years' imprisonment for each one of the crimes.

"- Seven crimes of serious injury, already defined, and sentences each of them to four years and six months' imprisonment for each of the crimes.

"- Two crimes of less serious injury, as defined above, with use of explosives, and sentences each of them to six months' imprisonment for each of the crimes.

"- Thirteen crimes of injury, and sentences each of them to thirty days' imprisonment for each of the crimes.

"- One crime of causing enormous damage and endangering public safety, as defined above, and sentences each of the defendants to twelve years' imprisonment.

[..]

"The court hereby recognises the obligation of both defendants, as liable for civil damages both jointly with each other and also with other convicted persons as perpetrators of the same act, to compensate the injured parties and victims [..]."

National Court judgement no. 32/2003

BUREAUCRACY AND PAIN

The people injured in the attack got in touch with each other without the government making it any easier for them. The most seriously injured met for the first time in a waiting room when they had to be forensically examined to assess their injuries 174 days after the attack. They did not know each other and nor did they know that they were all victims of the same terrorist action. It was not until 1989, after the first Hipercor court judgement, that they began to work together. The public authorities failed to help the victims get organised, were mean-spirited when it came to recognising their rights and showed no interest in following up the people affected.

Only thirteen victims and/or relatives received the compensation to which they were entitled by the government's secondary civil liability for failure to act (recognised by the court judgement) as the police did not evacuate Hipercor. The courts rejected the right to this compensation for another thirty-three victims.

Sixteen years after the attack and during the second hearing against the members of ETA's Barcelona commando, some victims said that the authorities had never contacted them at any time to find out about their health. Also in 2003 the Catalan Association of Victims of Terrorist Organisations was set up which has tried to help those affected to overcome the obstacle course they are faced with.

In addition to physical and psychological pain as a victim or relative of a victim, in the case of Hipercor this has been added to by how the attack has been forgotten and the difficulties put in their way by the authorities, with numerous appeals to the courts and refusals by the National Institute of Social Security to recognise pension rights.

JORDI MORALES

He lost his father and mother when he was 7 years old.

In 1999 he had to hire a lawyer to file a claim as a victim, since as a minor he did not appear in the 1989 judgement.

XAVIER VALLS

Xavier and his brother lost their father at the age of 9 and 6 respectively.

In the absence of institutional communication, their mother sent telegrams of condolence to Jordi Pujol, First Minister of Catalonia, and Pasqual Maragall, Mayor of Barcelona.

NÚRIA MANZANARES - ENRIC VICENTE

They lost their two children and Núria's sister.

They were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder 15 years after the attack.

They filed a claim for recognition of the consequences as victims; at present they are only recognised as a non-occupational disease.

MILAGROS RODRÍGUEZ - JÉSSICA LÓPEZ

Milagros was working at Hipercor and three and a half months pregnant when the bomb went off. Her daughter, Jéssica López, was born deaf.

The injury was not recognised until the second judgement (2003) when she was included as a victim of the attack.

ROBERT MANRIQUE

He was working in Hipercor when the bomb went off.

During the treatment of his burns he contracted two types of hepatitis.

After half a dozen appeals, he is now recognised as having total permanent disability.

EPILOGUE

Victims of indiscriminate terrorist attacks have received little recognition from government. Apart from occasional expressions of condemnation, there has been no construction of public memory for the victims. Events to make claims or commemorate the attack have in general have been carried out by political representatives who have merely repeated a few things about terrorism for the occasion.

In the case of Hipercor, it was not until 16 June 2017 on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the attack that a plaque was put up to remember the victims in front of the department store on Meridiana Avenue. The following day, Saturday 17 June, the relatives of the people who died at Hipercor led an event at the monument to the victims of terrorism in Barcelona.

For the first time without political speeches taking centre stage, this tribute in the form of an emotional performance was acknowledgment of the painful and solitary journey that they have had to go on to claim their dignity and memory in the face of the overwhelming silence of the public authorities.

*No man is an island, entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's
or of thine own were.
Any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind;
and therefore never send to know
for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee.*

John Donne