

Spain and Real Madrid: a country at the service of a football club

Attacking FC Barcelona is a favourite pastime of the right wing Spanish press (located mostly in Madrid) and lately they have been having such a great time at Leo Messi's expense, that it seems the ideal moment to point out some dark areas in Real Madrid's history.

1. The Spanish government approved a law in 2006 that dramatically reduced the income tax rate for foreigners from 43% to 24% during their first five years as residents in Spain. The goal was to attract "qualified people", but the 'coincidence' was that this law was passed just as David Beckham was hired by Real Madrid, so the club and the player reaped big advantages from the legislation, so much so that this law is known as the 'Beckham Act'.

2. The journalist Carles Torras has just published a book (The Hidden History of Real Madrid) that explains the whole network of friends and political influences that caused Real Madrid to become known as 'the government team'.

3. Several controversial corruption cases, such as the 'Bernabeu corner' (real estate corruption case), or the 'sports city' scandal (in which the City Council paid 22 million

euros for land with a value of 488,000 euros) have conveniently been forgotten by the media.

4. This suspicion about different treat-

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ment for Real Madrid comes to mind with all the gossip surrounding Real Madrid star, Cristiano Ronaldo's contract renewal to 2015. The new contract should have to meet the new law modified in 2010, which increased the tax rate from 24% to 43%. It is hard to believe that Messi is accused of tax fraud but not Cristiano and Real Madrid, which is thanks to the "special treatment from the Spanish authorities".

Real Madrid is complicit at the highest levels of the administration – Rubalcaba or Rajoy today and others yesterday – as well as at the intermediate and technical levels.

There exists in the Bernabeu a culture of favours and the use of the state's resources for spurious purposes, a sort of buddy capitalism that we could call the Cibeles model. It is a corporate culture rooted in the environment of economic interventionism, of friends and the favours with which Real Madrid benefits, which is light years away from Catalan business culture.

In Madrid they have a clear view that they must attack Catalans by land, air and sea, and they do so. Everything is allowed if it is against the Catalans. And FC Barcelona is a key piece. With the Messi case, they can put Catalans in a tight spot: either we disown Messi or we support a criminal. It's a clever tactic they can use because they control the state apparatus and use it thoroughly.

The Messi case has coincided with other contentious proceedings in the courts of law that the papers in Madrid present as examples of a Sicilian Catalonia, in order to damage the Catalan cause. The irony is that the Corleone image is far more appropriate as a symbol of Madrid and the state administration than of Catalonia and FC Barcelona.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

TERRY PARRIS Writer

Microcosm and Macrocosm

In Catalonia family takes centre-stage. It's very important, not only encompassing mother, father, grandparents and children, but also aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces and more...

The family can be a microcosm of the world at large. In our family alone for instance, starting with mother, father, six children and four grandparents, the adults

living now incorporate a writer, a taxi driver, a designer, an artist, a poet, a farmer, a business man and woman, a furniture maker, a teacher, a gardener, a film editor, an electrician, and that's not counting the future careers of great-grand-children.

With all this wealth of family connectedness and care do we give as much love

and attention to the macrocosm of the world's vast population?

And to the earth, the flora and fauna, animals, insects, fish...? It is never too much for us when our family calls for help. Do we rush to help others and all those others who need help? Is the love and consideration given to the 'micro' reflected in the masses of the 'macro'?

VERBA DOCENT, EXEMPLA TRAHUNT GERMÀ CAPDEVILA gcapdevila@cataloniatoday.cat



"People in Catalonia want to change the way they live, they want to be an independent country"

Josep Guardiola, manager of German Bundesliga club FC Bayern München

Guardiola has put it simply. If people want to change things in a democratic way, there should be no problem. The Spanish government and the European Union should help Catalans express themselves in a referendum.