

The national shotgun

The National Shotgun is a film by Luis García Berlanga that captured the world of business and politics in Spain's late Franco era, that final stage of the dictatorship which came to an end with the death of the caudillo in 1975. As the regime eroded, the dynamics of power —and the relationships among those who moved comfortably around the institutions— became clearer than ever.

The plot reveals how the pursuit of private interests fuels countless interactions, and how the line separating ethics from convenience dissolves the moment an opportunity appears. In this web of silences and complicities — stretching from small-town councils to the upper tiers of the state— bribers and bribed coexist as if they were a natural feature of the landscape.

As collective responsibility evaporated behind complicit gestures and evasive glances, some avoided uncomfortable questions while others hid behind opacity. Corruption slipped almost effortlessly into the institutional routine. Practices of influence and favor, deeply rooted in our political tradition, spread into society at large, reinforcing a culture that normalizes the unacceptable.

Corruption —systemic, persistent, everyday— pollutes everything: the education system, the courts, government action, public procurement, and access to jobs. It operates quietly, while a culture of discretion and “inner trust” replaces institutional oversight. Is there anyone left in Spain who truly believes that a secretary-

general or a president was unaware of what was happening under their watch?

We must abandon the convenient idea that “the courts will take care of it.” This is the time for political accountability. The key is exemplarity, for without it there can be no legitimate exercise of public office.

That framework of silence created a system in which no one asked, and no one wished to know. Corruption settled into the landscape as an inevitable fact —never examined, never addressed. And it is useless to ask citizens for a kind of therapeutic forgiveness that wipes away the sin. In politics there are no indulgences: you simply step aside.

Public debate often treats corruption with a solemn superficiality, rarely digging into its roots or the networks that sustain it. The media almost always focus on the corrupted —politicians and public officials— while relegating the corruptors, those who initiate or bankroll these practices. That selective gaze breeds moral resignation and strengthens the sense that nothing can ever change.

Nor is it acceptable to hide behind the claim that “we didn’t know.” Legal responsibility may be in decline, but *in eligendo* and *in vigilando* still matter: those who choose their inner circles are accountable for them. Yet society seems increasingly accustomed to the political misdeeds it claims to abhor.

As headlines succeed one another and public opinion drifts between skepticism and indifference, the web of favors continues to be woven behind closed doors. The root of the problem remains untouched: the corrupter operates like an inexhaustible *deus ex machina* with whom we seem condemned to coexist.

Would there be corruption without corruptors? There will always be those who use power for personal gain, but social condemnation —paradoxically— tends to fall almost exclusively on the corrupted.

Society asks what failed, or what is failing. And then the real questions emerge: Who drafted the specifications? Who sat on the procurement committee? Who evaluated the bids? Who supervised the execution and the payments?

The answer lies in identifying those who have turned their backs on the law and enforcing a legal framework already strict enough to prevent these abuses: prosecuting and imprisoning corrupt business people, and disqualifying corrupt politicians and civil servants. Only strong and vigilant institutions can halt a drift that threatens the very credibility of the state.

What should not be acceptable —yet often is— is our continued refusal to examine the amounts involved, the corruptor behind the scenes, and the conditions of the corrupted. This is a democratic culture problem, one that touches the very meaning of public service. The power to corrupt institutions and impose private interests above

the law ought to alarm us. Confronting the corruptor is Public Ethics 101.

Half a century later, corruptors and the corrupted still move with the same ease. Berlanga did not film a satire; he filmed a diagnosis. And his cinema, more clinical than comic, continues to portray us with uncomfortable precision.

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Madrid, November 21, 2025