

Young African workers killed in Spanish enclave

Keith Lee
3 October 2005

At least six people have died in recent days trying to climb over the six-metre fences surrounding the tiny Spanish town of Ceuta.

A mass attempt to scale the wall by hundreds of Africans seeking to migrate to Spain via Morocco began around three in the morning on September 28. Such actions by thousands of migrants have been going on for two months. However, over the last few days the numbers have dramatically increased in an effort by migrants to get into Spain before all avenues are closed off. In Melilla, one of Spain's enclaves in North Africa, parts of the 10-kilometre-long perimeter fence have already been raised to a height of six meters.

African workers have been using makeshift ladders made from trees nearby to climb the fence. As yet unconfirmed reports have stated that police opened fire on the crowd. Workers said they had been met with police and Spanish Legion troops firing rubber bullets on their side of the border.

On the Moroccan side, security services with shotguns and rifles with fixed bayonets have met migrant workers. One man has been confirmed dead. Friends of Joseph Abunaw, 17, from Douala in Cameroon say that he had been beaten with a rifle butt and was found vomiting blood.

In August the body of another 17-year-old Cameroonian youth, Joe Ypo, was found near the fence separating Morocco from Mellila. Reports from semi-official sources state that Ypo was killed in a stampede or accident after Spain's notorious Civil Guard dressed in full riot gear had attacked 300 immigrants who were trying cross the militarised fence surrounding the enclave. However, eyewitnesses claim that Ypo had broken through the fence with the others, was beaten on the Spanish side and then dumped back on Moroccan territory where he died.

One eyewitness alleged, "This day [the day Ypo died] was as many others. This time there were no Moroccan cops, it was us and the Spanish Civil Guard. Many of us went through the gate, we were in Melilla and the Civil Guard opened the little door and sent us back to Morocco. The cops sent back the wounded, the healthy and they sent back two dead bodies.

"The night was dark, we were afraid that the Moroccan military could come and deport us to Oujda [on the border with Algeria], finishing the job of the Civil Guard. So we hid in the bush. Only in the morning we found the body of one of our brothers, apparently dead. We also saw in the light of dawn the heads of the police close to the gate, and we realized that something terrible had happened. The Moroccans said that there was another dead body.

"We were standing close to the corpse; we made a couple of phone calls, asking for help, trying to make the international authorities aware of what was happening. Somebody came, filmed and could witness that we are saying the truth. Also Medecins Sans Frontieres saw the wounded and one of the corpses; they also know that one of the two dead had his stomach wounded."

Another eyewitness described the dangers immigrants faced at the border fence. He explained how the Civil Guard "have gases that asphyxiate us, they have plastic bullets. They have real bullets too, and sometimes you can hear them at night. We have our hands and our feet, and the idea not to react. What is important is the collective, and it is the hope that sustained us along the way to Europe from our origin countries.... The cops have long truncheons too, falling on our bodies, breaking our bones and our hope. Some of these truncheons are electrified, and you can feel your body trembling, you cannot breathe anymore, and you feel

that you are dying.”

Medecins Sans Frontieres has since confirmed that Ypo died from internal bleeding caused by a ruptured liver and that there was a second immigrant who also suffered injuries and may have died, but that no body has yet been found. MSF workers said that after the incident it treated seven immigrants for multiple bone fractures. Hospital workers in the Moroccan town of Nador also said they had seen one person with injuries to the chest consistent with the marks made by rubber bullets.

The doubling of the size of the border fence was the response of Spain’s Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) government to these terrible events. The fence built in the late 1990s with \$35 million of European Union (EU) funds is a double metal wire barricade with watch posts, sensor pads, security video cameras and fibre optic sensors and is defended by the brutal Spanish Legion and the Civil Guard. Raising the height of the fence to six metres costs nearly \$1 million, making it higher than the old Berlin Wall.

Civil Guard officials denied that their officers had anything to do with Ypo’s death and claimed it was probably an accident. The Spanish and Moroccan governments have said an official investigation is under way.

The PSOE has also stepped up its anti-immigrant collaboration with Moroccan security forces. The Spanish authorities have held joint operations aimed at preventing immigrants using Morocco as a route into Spain. The Moroccan Ministry of Defence said that its police had arrested 242 people so far. In the first eight months of the year Spain’s Ministry of Labour reports that there has been a near 40 percent drop in immigrants reaching Spain from the African coast.

The PSOE has tried to control the supply of cheap labour by legalising a percentage of immigrants already in Spain without citizenship through an “amnesty.” The Ministry of Labour has boasted that foreign workers granted legal status—an extra 600,000 people—have vastly increased government income through increased social security payments. Of the 1.6 million foreigners now contributing, 226,000 originated from Morocco. The PSOE government is desperate to raise new sources of finance as EU funds dry up following the entry of poorer countries from Eastern Europe who qualify for the funding that Spain used to receive.

The PSOE is conducting a two-pronged strategy in the North African region of the Maghreb. One is to work with the EU to create “order” on the southern borders of “Fortress Europe,” stabilising its relations with its African neighbours and regulating immigration. The other is to meet the demands of big business for access to African markets, especially the special economic zones and greater involvement in the rapid privatisation programmes that are under way in countries such as Morocco.

An additional factor is Spain’s need for energy. Dr. Peter Gold, principal lecturer in Spanish Area Studies and head of school at the University of the West of England, explains in *Europe or Africa—A contemporary study of the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla* that a significant factor in Spain’s involvement in the Maghreb has been the need for reliable sources of energy. This has involved financing a 1,430-kilometre-long gas pipeline from Algeria via Morocco to Spain, exploration for oil in southern Algeria and an underwater cable to link the Spanish and Moroccan electricity grids. Gold notes that after France, Spain is the second largest investor in Morocco, and more than 20 percent of Morocco’s overseas investments are made in Spain.

In return for its cooperation with Spain over immigration, Morocco expects Spain’s help in its efforts to obtain “a privileged status” with the EU.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact