

Spanish air traffic controller: “We have arrived at something akin to Stalinist Russia, the Stasi or Hitler’s SS”

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The following correspondence has been sent to the World Socialist Web Site by a Spanish air traffic controller. It details the impact of the emergency legislation imposed by the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government, bringing in military control of airports, including forced labour at gunpoint.

I am an air traffic controller in Spain. Spain is supposed to be a free country, subject to the rule of law, a democracy led by a Socialist government. But that is all false!

Since February 5, when the government came up with their first Royal Decree Law (RDL), we have had no rights. We don’t have the right to negotiate. Our collective agreement has been abolished. We are working more hours than is allowed for in the Workers’ Statute. They have written a law that goes against the Spanish Constitution. I know it sounds incredible, but it’s true.

Since then, we have had eight more RDLs and two Ministerial Orders, an Agreement with the Ministry of Development and so many verbal promises from the Ministry. All of them have been broken, and they have done whatever they have wanted with us.

Mothers and fathers couldn’t ask for a reduction in working hours (which is in our Workers’ Statute). We don’t get paid for sick leave.

We said that we were going to go on strike and they made everybody think that we were kidnappers and that we were blackmailing the government. We don’t have the right to go on strike any more! I thought that the

Workers’ Statute and the Spanish Constitution were for all Spanish citizens and workers, but it seems that it’s not for us. And eventually it won’t be for anybody. We participated in the General Strike on September 29, but [state-dictated] minimum service provision was maintained by the unions! What kind of strike is that?

They do everything so badly that by mid-December almost 90 percent of Air Traffic Controllers had exceeded the working hours set by them in the RDL (a maximum of 1,670 hours without counting holidays). People stopped working in Santiago due to this. It goes against the Air Security Law here in Spain to work when you have exceeded the maximum working hours. That’s why they threatened us with another RDL in which we must work as many hours as they want us to. They also announced that they were going to privatise AENA, the aviation authority. This will net them so much money—you can’t imagine how much money they are going to get with this sale.

This Friday, we decided to meet in permanent session because of this last RDL. They said that they would publish the RDL by the morning, but they didn’t. They waited to see our reaction. We didn’t know what was going to happen to us and so we decided to organise a sick-day protest. They didn’t give us any other choice. We were all very scared, because we knew that we could go to jail or we could be seized. But we were desperate. It was the only way to win back our rights, to get back the freedom that we should have in a democracy.

Everything that we allow them to get away with sets a precedent for what can then be imposed by the

judiciary on all Spanish citizens. This is a hidden dictatorship. The King signed an illegal decree-law militarising air traffic control.

The State of Alarm meant that we could be treated as military staff and mobilised under military supervision and discipline. The State of Alarm is completely unconstitutional in this case. Then they threatened to take us, one by one, to the “military police”. They would threaten each of us with 10 years in prison and the seizure of all our possessions if we didn’t get back to work. If that wasn’t enough, they would threaten us with putting our families on the street with no money and no place to go and who knows what else.

The only thing I know is how I felt when I saw our union president when he came from the Ministry of Development. He broke down. He almost couldn’t open his eyes. He was crying. None of us could help crying when he began talking. I can’t help crying now when I remember it. He told us everything that they had told him. They know everything about us. They know who they have to take. They gave the union the full names of the people who were going to be the first ones taken—well, after all of our union leaders.

And why do they know so much? Because they are using the CNI [the National Intelligence Center—Centro Nacional de Inteligencia—Spain’s secret service]. They have hacked the web site of USCA [Spain’s Union of Air Traffic Controllers]. They have bugged our mobile phones. They listen to everything that we say.

All the military were called in for duty on Friday morning, even those on leave or doing training courses.

When I think about it after the event, it makes me think that the government has set a trap for us. I’m Spanish and I have to think about a bullfight. They have shown us the cape and we have to go for it like a Miura bull. They were waiting for us with their sword and have killed us.

They have used us to establish the State of Alarm. Why—because under this legislation the judiciary can’t be challenged. They are in the government until this State of Alarm is cancelled. They can do whatever they

want. They have used us to provide a smokescreen for all manner of attacks—the privatisation of AENA, the cut in social service....

Now I’m under military command. I had to sign a text saying that I’m under the Penal and Disciplinary Regime proper to the Armed Forces. I don’t have the right of association. I don’t have the right to hold meetings because it’s considered as conspiracy. I don’t have the right of free speech. I cannot speak out against the government (I don’t know what they can do to me for writing this text). I cannot resign from my post.

I know it’s very hard to believe that this is really happening, but it’s real life. I feel like I am living in “The Matrix” since February; I hoped so many times that this was all just a nightmare and I was going to wake up, but it never happens. It’s not a movie or a nightmare.

We have arrived at something akin to Stalinist Russia or the Stasi spy network of Eastern Germany, or under Hitler’s SS.



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