

Spain's M-15 protests continue

Our reporters
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The occupation of Spain's main Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid continued over the weekend, and protests are set to carry on next week. The square is in front of the former post office building, now the office of the Popular Party (PP) President of the regional government of Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre.

Thousands of people attended some 120 assemblies in neighbourhoods and communes of Madrid on Saturday. Up to 800 gathered in some of these demonstrations in the capital.

On Sunday, thousands gathered in the Puerta del Sol. Protesters held banners with slogans including, "Enough!", "They will not shut us up," "Earning 600 euros a month is terrorism".

These protests continue in the face of growing threats of a violent police crackdown by the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government in the aftermath of the brutal repression of the occupation of the main square in Barcelona on Friday that saw 120 injured.

Buildings overlooking the Puerta del Sol are covered in homemade banners including one exclaiming, "Madrid, capital of the Spanish revolution". Another large banner reads, "Thieving bankers are to blame for the crisis." A banner hung over the entrance to the Metro station on the square declared putting all corrupt politicians in jail would solve fifty percent of the country's problems.

The centre area of the square is covered with hundreds of tents, where students have been joined by poorer youth. The encampment is dominated by stalls staffed by various groups promoting themes such as feminism, ecology and constitutional law. There is also a library, including books on various sociological theories. There are no political parties represented with stalls. Representatives from organisations within the

May 15 (M-15) movement have emphasised that the mass protests in Spain and the revolutionary upheaval in Egypt and Tunisia earlier this year are not connected in their aims—stating that unlike Egypt they had "democracy" in Spain, so people were still able to influence the political process.

A reporter from the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed a spokeswoman, Marianne Martinez, for the Puerta del Sol camp who stated, "It is not a struggle to destroy the government. It's about the government listening to the voice of the people."

In contrast, a group of Arab protesters marched toward the headquarters of the camp carrying a banner declaring, "The Arab world and [Puerta del] Sol, the same struggle" and placards declaring, "Barcelona is not alone." There was no formal welcome from the camp representatives.

The M-15 movement's leaders are happier to proclaim that their inspiration is not the revolutionary upheaval in the Middle East and North Africa, but the protest movement in the aftermath of the collapse of the Icelandic banks.

Despite the mass of protesters being clearly hostile to the two main parties, the unstated premise of the M-15's leaders, which are rooted in the anti-globalisation movements such as ATTAC, is that the PSOE is more progressive than the PP and cannot be politically challenged. Pressure, they insist, should be applied to force the PSOE to act against corruption, rather than wage a struggle for power.

In fact, the PSOE is imposing brutal austerity measures using military and police repression to crack down on opposition. Indeed, Britain's *Financial Times* has urged the PP not to press for early elections but to pledge its support for the PSOE's austerity measures.

Another feature of the protests is the absence of any visible presence of the ex-left groups. This is because they have subordinated themselves to the semi-official leaders and fully support extending an amnesty to the PSOE. As one representative explained, these parties had offered to assist in the strengthening of the M-15's "structures."

This support for the governing party comes as the PSOE is preparing a further shift to the right. The party's leadership has just selected Deputy Prime Minister Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba to be the next leader. This nomination will now be sent to the party's congress for ratification.

Rubalcaba led the assault against the air traffic controllers last December/January. The controllers were protesting the imposition of wage cuts and increased hours and were forced back to work by armed soldiers.

Rubalcaba demanded that the workers be prosecuted and subjected to prison sentences. He has been in discussions with the head of the regional PP government, Esperanza Aguirre, who with the support of the PSOE last summer had threatened to use troops against striking Madrid Metro workers and who is now demanding a police operation to clear Puerta del Sol.



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