

What way forward for Spain's "angry ones"?

Chris Marsden
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The mass demonstrations that began in Spain on May 15 have been driven by the immense popular anger over the austerity measures imposed by the Socialist Party (PSOE) government. These measures are being implemented, amid widespread hardship and unemployment levels that reach close to 50 percent among 18 to 25-year-olds—the core of *los indignados* (the angry ones).

The protests are characterised by a rejection of all the major parties, the PSOE above all, as well as the trade unions, which have done nothing to oppose the attacks on workers and youth since mounting a token one-day protest strike on September 29 last year. Neither has the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) benefitted from the rising social protests, due to its long history of pushing through cuts wherever it has established a base in regional and local authorities.

The movement has won considerable sympathy among working people, who expressed their own political alienation by turning away from the PSOE in droves in last Sunday's regional and local elections, with more than a million casting blank or spoiled ballots.

It has also inspired solidarity protests across Europe—in Italy, France, Germany, Britain, and Belgium—in what the *Guardian* described as a "youth-led rebellion ... spreading across southern Europe... united by a rejection of mainstream politicians and fury over spending cuts."

On Wednesday, the most significant aftershock from Spain's political earthquake was felt in Greece, where 15,000 gathered in Athens and 30,000 nationally to protest against the social democratic PASOK government's imposition of austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank. Protesters chanted, "Thieves, thieves," outside the Greek parliament, demanding, "It is time those who created the crisis left".

The M-15 protests have been dubbed the "Spanish Revolution". But left at their present level, in the absence of a clear program, perspective and political leadership, this mass movement will prove woefully inadequate to defeat ruling elites that are determined to impose the full weight of Europe's bank bailouts and the deepening recession onto the backs of working people.

One should recall that in March, 300,000 protesters, mobilized by "The Scraping-By Generation" web site, marched in eleven cities across Portugal. Yet today this movement has evaporated, even as all the major parties compete to win the June 5 General Election based upon promises to impose savage spending cuts and tax rises in return for the €78 billion bailout agreed by the European Union and IMF.

There is a growing sense among some of those involved that their protest is reaching an impasse, with nothing being advanced other than appeals to maintain the sit-ins as long as possible. Yet, an atmosphere has been cultivated in which efforts to advance a political agenda outside of "more protests" in "more cities" is decried as an attempt to "hijack the movement".

The M-15 protests are led by a number of Internet-based campaigns, which collectively assert that there exists "no leadership" and that the movement has a "horizontal structure". At the same time, they insist that no *other* grouping must "dictate" its politics to the protests.

Yet definite political tendencies are at work. Real Democracy Now, inspired by the various anti-globalization movements that have been cultivated in leading circles over the past decade and more, advocates a series of minor social and electoral reforms, but does not challenge the very parties and organizations responsible for the predicament now facing millions of workers and youth. Another group, "*nolesvotes*", is the creation of prominent businessmen,

including one involved in social networking.

Ready to reinforce and police what amounts to an amnesty for the PSOE and the trade union bureaucracy are the various ex-left formations advancing themselves as “revolutionary” and “socialist”. Collectively, they glorify the spontaneous character of the movement and its lack of a perspective, only in order to deaden the critical faculties of workers and youth.

Miguel Urban of the *Izquierda Anticapitalista*, affiliated to the United Secretariat, writes of an uncompleted “narrative”, a “discourse and practice that must be kept company, which it is possible to construct along the road”.

En Lucha calls for the “enormous energy, courage and creativity shown in the camps... to be channeled into the great material strength of the working class”, by which they mean behind the trade union apparatus, “something we saw, albeit in passing, during the general strike of 29 September.”

The *El Militante* group is more naked still in professing its political loyalties, insisting that the future of the M-15 protest movement lies in accepting the leadership of the “union leaders of the CCOO and UGT”, who must “assume their responsibility of giving a response in face of the attacks being suffered by the working class, the youth, the unemployed and the pensioners.”

These tendencies claim this perspective has been vindicated by the Arab Spring, when precisely the opposite is the case.

In Egypt and Tunisia, protest movements far broader than the one that has swept Spain over the past weeks succeeded in toppling dictators, but they left dictatorial regimes in place. Rather than the genuine democratic transformation longed for by the masses, the parties of the bourgeoisie have acted to safeguard the wealth of the privileged few through ever more brutal repression of the working class. This has all been carried out with the active collusion of the trade union leaders who sit on various advisory committees on “democratic reform”, even as their members are attacked and strikes are made illegal. Meanwhile all of the social ills that gave rise to mass discontent, mass unemployment and grinding poverty remain.

The same issues face the workers and youth of Spain, Europe and the world.

The working class is involved in something far more

than a fight against corrupt politicians. These politicians are merely the well-paid defenders of a capitalist class and a system that is based upon the ever more savage exploitation of the masses of working people.

The global economic crisis that first erupted in 2008 has not been resolved. It gets worse by the day. The full brunt is felt by working people even as the bankers and speculators reward themselves with massive bonuses and pay rises. These are not aberrations that can be corrected by appeals for reforms. They indicate that the essential feature of capitalism identified by Marx—“An accumulation of wealth at one pole of society indicates an accumulation of misery and overwork at the other”—now operates without any democratic restraint.

Preserving the living standards and the essential social benefits of working people is no longer compatible with the continued existence of the profit system. Nothing less than a fundamental socialist transformation of society will do. In Spain and internationally, the working class is being thrust into a political struggle against the entire capitalist order. The task now on the agenda is the fight for a workers’ government that will take the commanding heights of the economy into social ownership, placing the banks and major corporations under the democratic control of the workers themselves.

This demands the building of a new political party and a new leadership that will fight for the social interests of working class and a young generation that has no future under the existing set-up. The International Committee of the Fourth International, its European sections and the *World Socialist Web Site* are dedicated to the establishment of such a party in Spain and throughout the world.

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