

Police beat anti-austerity protesters in Barcelona, Spain

Our reporters
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Spanish police yesterday fired rubber bullets and beat protesters with truncheons in a vicious attempt to clear anti-austerity demonstrators from the Plaza de Catalunya square in Barcelona.

The Catalan riot police attacked at around 6.45 am, after protesters staged a sit-in to stop a convoy of cleaning trucks leaving the square after dismantling their encampment, under police supervision. Demonstrators chanted, "They shall not pass!"

Without warning, police moved in after firing tear gas canisters. Protesters were dragged away by police, and there are numerous reports of rubber bullets being fired. An official denied this, stating that police fired compressed-air guns that shoot blanks. Demonstrators reported that police officers were not wearing their identification numbers.

Around 100 protesters regrouped in the square, while hundreds more were prevented from doing so by police cordons. "We will return," they chanted. In the face of determined resistance, the police eventually retreated and thousands flooded the square, though numbers later dwindled.

A report in the *Financial Times* gave a glimpse of the police brutality. "Protesters described a crowd of several hundred slowly walking towards a group of police hitting a woman with a baton. The crowd clapped and chanted ironically: 'This is your democracy!'"

Ten people were taken to the hospital, and five remain. Their condition is said to be not serious. Estimates of those suffering minor injuries range between 40 and 90, including one police officer.

Videos of the police assault on the peaceful protesters have been uploaded to YouTube. This includes video footage of a riot police officer chasing a protestor and

firing his weapon at him.

The first attempt by police to clear demonstrators involved in the nationwide movement that began May 15 was done using the pretext of Saturday's Barcelona/Manchester United football game in London. The square, the police claimed, would be needed for celebrations in case of a Barcelona victory.

Police also cleared an encampment at the nearby Plaza Ricard Vinyes in Lleida using the same excuse, arresting two.

That evening up to 20,000 protesters demonstrated in the Plaza de Catalunya in defiance of the actions of the police.

The violent assault on the protesters in Barcelona is not an isolated incident. Interior Minister Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba yesterday began moves to forcibly remove the protesters camped in the Puerta Del Sol in Madrid.

At a press conference on Friday in Madrid, Rubalcaba said, "I will analyze the situation with the police and we will take a decision". The Expatica.com website reported that Rubalcaba had been in close consultation with Popular Party regional politicians and local businessmen who are demanding that the government remove the protesters.

Rubalcaba's statement reveals the role of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government as a repressive arm of the financial elite. According to reports on Friday, PSOE Prime Minister Jose Zapatero has proposed Rubalcaba as the candidate to lead the party into the 2012 general elections.

During the evening the protests in Puerta del Sol continued, along with smaller protests in a host of other cities. The Madrid demonstrations involved thousands of people, many chanting slogans in solidarity with the demonstrators in Barcelona.

Further solidarity demonstrations took place in Paris Friday and are scheduled for today in Dublin and Cork, Ireland.



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