More evidence of provocations, repression of Barcelona protests

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The demonstration in Barcelona last Wednesday by up to 3,000 protesters outside the Catalán parliament was subjected to a vicious police attack. Now more evidence is emerging of the use of undercover police provocateurs.

The protests were peaceful, seeking to prevent the 2011 budget from being passed by blocking the adjacent streets and not letting the deputies of all political parties from entering and voting. Those involved chanted, “You don’t represent us” at all the deputies, until a few groups of individuals started throwing empty plastic bottles, paint and bananas at the politicians and police.

The police attempted to disperse the crowds with batons and rubber bullets, leaving 21 injured. Five arrests were made. These protesters may face up to five years in prison.

The police actions ordered by Catalán Internal Affairs Minister Felip Puig were supported by his counterpart in the central government, Alfredo Rubalcaba, who threatened, “If the demonstrations develop peacefully, we will act prudently. If someone wants to do otherwise, we will be firm.”

Rubalcaba was responsible last December for ordering military intervention against striking air traffic controllers.

Amateur videos posted on YouTube show at least 10 police infiltrators in the demonstration, one with an illegal extended baton. They were identified by the protesters and surrounded until the police came to their rescue and escorted them behind the security lines.

Another video shows one of these agent provocateurs throwing stones at a police van.

Photographs posted on line show a provocateur speaking with a policeman in one frame and, in the next, throwing objects at a police van.

Infiltrating demonstrations in order to either provoke or instigate violence is a long-established method of legitimizing violent intervention by the police in otherwise peaceful demonstrations and bringing in repressive legislation.

The methods used by the Mossos d’esquadre, the regional Catalán police, bring to mind the stated mission of the Francoite police, Los grises (the greys): “Permanent and total vigilance, and repression when necessary.”

Of the 600 police, a ratio of one to every five protesters, many had their faces covered with balaclavas and identification numbers concealed. The police are obliged by a law passed by the previous regional government in 2008 to have their identification on display.

Failure to display identification has been a common police practice since the smashing of student protests against the university reform implemented in 2009. Dozens of court cases involving students affected by the police charges during the demonstrations in March 2009 ended up being closed for lack of police identity. Some judges asked the police to provide the identities of the officers involved, but these requests were all rejected. The same has happened in the recent court cases against the police charges last May against the camp in Plaça Catalonia, which left 121 injured.

A major attack on democratic rights is recorded in another video that shows how the police surround the press, forcing them to one corner and blocking their access to the demonstration. Chants can be heard by the protesters calling, “Let the press in.” One journalist says to another, “What is happening?” and another says, “We are making calls”—most likely to their editorial department or the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The video shows how some journalists are behind the

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police lines, suggesting that they have been allowed to report while others were not. These reporters were the ones who would take the photographs and film the choreographed scenes of violence.

The Internet user who first posted the video revealing the 10 infiltrated agents, and who then posted the video on the journalists, stated in a public email:

"Friends, after uploading the video 'Who are the violent ones,' I have received several threats of possible criminal charges, which is why I have withdrawn it [the video] from my YouTube account.

"Very serious things are happening because they are not respecting the most basic democratic rights. The government is spreading lies and acting with mafia style methods. I am scared, really.

"I send you another video [the one of the journalists] with evidence of blatant anti-democratic practices. [Neither] TV3 [the Catalán public television] nor any other media has said anything or said the whole truth: I filmed this at first hand. I urge maximum distribution, but don't mention me, please."

These threats are not surprising. Catalán Internal Affairs Minister Puig recently stated in an interview that he was going to ask YouTube to stop posting the videos in which the infiltrated agents are seen, contradicting his initial statement made the day after the demonstrations that there were no police infiltrators in the demonstration. "The YouTube film is false, it has been orchestrated," he declared.

Puig has also threatened legal action against Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona Professor Arcadi Oliveras, president of the Justice and Peace Association, a member of the *Monthly Review* editorial board and of the advisory board of ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens' Action), for implying that the violence might have been the result of agents provocateurs, "because in previous events there had been similar situations."

Oliveras has achieved a degree of prominence since 2008 for his lectures on the financial crisis, the bailouts, war and attacks on democratic rights. He is admired by youth within the 15 May movement for his public support and lectures at the different camps set up in the main squares around Spain. The attack on Oliveras is symptomatic of the fact that the ruling class will not tolerate any political dissent or even theoretical criticism of its austerity measures.

The media has dutifully lined up to condemn the protesters, portraying them as violent thugs. They have ignored the YouTube videos, which have been viewed by thousands.

On its daily morning program "El Circulo," TeleMadrid showed images of violence from Greek protests, while saying that these were from the demonstration in Barcelona. The journalist can be heard commenting sarcastically, "They are armed with sticks. Very peaceful, huh?"

Another story repeated throughout the media was that the protesters attacked and tried to take the guide dog of a blind deputy of the ruling right-wing party. Another YouTube video shows that the protesters blocked the deputy's way, and his bodyguards simply got him and went in the opposite direction.

Most importantly, the media has written virtually nothing about what is being voted on within the Catalán parliament, and even less of a critical nature. The budget cuts for 2011 are the largest in the history of Spain since the death of the fascist dictator Francisco Franco. It poses the devastation of the already precarious living standards of millions of workers.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned last December, when the military was sent in against the striking air traffic controllers, "The events in Spain and other European nations reveal that the scale of social cuts being implemented—in order to make working people pay for a crisis not of their making—cannot be imposed on the basis of democratic rule."

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