

# Protests continue against budget cuts by Catalán parliament in Spain

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Last Wednesday up to 3,000 protesters gathered in front of the Catalán parliament at Cuitadella Park in Barcelona, the capital of the Catalonia region in Spain.

They aimed to block deputies from going inside and voting this year's budget, which will mean 10 percent cuts across the board.

The park had been closed down the day before. The next morning 400 heavily-armoured police were sent to stop the demonstrators from entering.

The president of the regional government, Artur Mas, was forced to arrive by helicopter along with other deputies of his party, while many others arrived in police vans or by foot. Those who walked were insulted and sprayed with paint. The protesters chanted, "You don't represent us".

Police tried to disperse the crowds by charging, resulting in 36 injuries, 12 of which are said to be police. These figures may be inflated, as the armour the police wear protects them from head to foot.

The police have been accused of instigating the violence, with YouTube videos revealing the presence of at least 10 undercover cops, one with an illegal extensible baton

(  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=YcmvzRvsf8g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=YcmvzRvsf8g)).

According to one eyewitness, "We saw clearly one police van arriving, three coming out dressed in plainclothes...the police infiltrators went directly to the demonstration...they started to insult [the deputies], throw empty bottles of water at them and more...after, one went directly to the van because the idiot had left his security clearance badge around his neck!"

This follows a series of allegations of police misconduct at recent protests. None of the 400 policemen had their identification numbers showing, as

they are obliged by law to do, and all had their faces covered with balaclavas. At an earlier May 27 demonstration in Plaça Catalonia square in Barcelona, police fired rubber bullets and beat protesters. (See: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2011/may2011/spai-m28.shtml>.)

Leading political figures have used these incidents to demand the forcible removal of the protesters. Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, the minister of internal affairs and chosen successor to Prime Minister José Zapatero, offered his support, while José Bono, president of the Spanish congress, declared that the police must "use all its force" against the protesters. Joan Ridaó of Catalán Esquerra said that "aggressions and insults to politicians are aggressions and insults to the representatives of the people".

The Spanish ruling class is making clear it will not tolerate any opposition amid acute and rising social tensions. Unemployment has reached 21 percent, including 43 percent among the youth; planned austerity measures include a €15 billion package of spending cuts, partially funded through a 5 percent reduction in civil servants' pay and pensions.

The bitter hostility displayed towards "the representatives of the people"—in fact, the representatives of the financial markets—is a sign that the working population will not accept the burden of the economic crisis being placed on their shoulders.

Even politicians who have postured as "left" over the years were jeered by the protesters. The leader of the Catalán Greens (Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds) was thrown a banana.

In Madrid, Cayo Lara of the ex-Stalinist United Left, was forced to flee after being denounced as an "opportunist", when he was talking with the media at a 300-strong demonstration against the eviction of a

family.

The cuts passed this year by the Catalán parliament amount to €4.4 billion in yearly public spending. The area most severely affected will be healthcare, which faces one billion euros in cuts. This means closing down entire floors of hospitals, not buying new equipment, and longer waiting lists and reducing staff.

There will also be cuts in education and social spending. The latest measure has been to eliminate aid to families with children below three years of age. Added to this, public spending on infrastructure will be cut by 42 percent.

The regional economic councillor deceitfully said, “This will mean a sacrifice for Catalonia”, but that it “will not mean a dismantling of the welfare state”.

Even so, the right-wing Catalán government has not fully complied with the limits placed on regional governments’ budget deficits set by the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) central government in Madrid. Instead of limiting the deficit to 1.3 percent of the budget, it has fixed a budget deficit of 2.6 percent.

The Zapatero government will demand yet more savage cuts in Catalonia and throughout Spain. The regional governments, based on a hybrid political system between federalism and centralism, control a third of the total public spending. Currently, 15 of the 19 autonomous regions are in hands of the right-wing Popular Party, whose leader has demanded “austerity”.

Madrid is demanding sharp cuts in the overall public deficit, to calm the international financial markets, in the face of mounting concern that Greece’s debt problem will be contagious. Spain also wants to borrow €9 billion, but the interest rate investors are demanding has increased over the past week.

Elena Salgado, the economy minister, has already attempted to appease the financial markets—phoning the *Wall Street Journal* to outline the government’s labour reforms.

The new measures mean that collective bargaining will not be conducted across industries and companies, but increasingly through individual negotiations between employee and employer. That is, collective bargaining is to be scrapped. Businesses will also be able to cut salaries if they declare that salaries threaten future profits.

Even so, business leaders have stated that these measures do not go far enough. Francisco González,

chairman of BBVA (one of Spain’ largest banks), said, “We need to urgently begin the construction of a new economic model for Spain...if we do not, then decisions will be made for us, and then we will have done irreparable damage to the Spanish people”.

None of the measures imposed by the PSOE over the past three years have resolved the deep crisis of Spanish capitalism, which is routinely spoken of as the next target of the currency speculation and a possible recipient of a bailout.

The PSOE has suffered its worst electoral defeat in the local and regional elections last month since the so-called Transition in 1977, as a result of the widespread hostility generated by its anti-worker policies. Now there is open speculation that the government may push for snap elections in the autumn, long before the scheduled March 2012 general elections.

In the absence of any viable political alternative advancing the interests of the working class, the main beneficiary up to date is the PP and the right-wing parties. The PP has been pushing for early elections since its victory over the PSOE in the regional and local elections. María Dolores de Cospedal, the PP’s spokeswoman, said they will govern “now, in the autumn or in March” in order to “make an about-face”.



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