

Protests continue as the police leave Madrid's Puerta del Sol

Alejandro López
8 August 2011

Protests by *indignados* (angry ones) of the 15-M movement have continued since last Tuesday, when 300 police forcibly evicted the 90 people remaining in Madrid's main square, Puerta del Sol.

That day police occupied Puerta del Sol with 50 vans, totally blocking access to the square. The Madrid local council and the Ministry of Interior ordered the closing down of the metro and railway station at the square.

In response, 5,000 *indignados* surrounded Sol in the adjacent streets. After finding the square completely blocked by two lines of riot police, many protestors marched through the city, blocking the main roads through the capital.

On Wednesday, thousands more demonstrated in front of the police lines in Puerta del Sol after blocking the main road, Gran Vía, for more than one hour. The main chants were "leave your weapons, you are surrounded" and "evict the police camp".

In an account published in *Público*, Eduard Muriel describes the day. "The *indignados*, after the sit down, decided to slowly advance towards the square until reaching the police line. Then, in moments of [the] greatest tension of the day, the police started to hit the protestors of the first line with their own hands. Two protestors had to move a third after he had received a punch in the stomach."

Previously, the police had been ordered not to use violence against protestors by the Ministry of Interior. This had been denounced as "pathetic" by the police trade union chief.

Ignacio Lario, president of the Association of small businesses of Puerta del Sol, insisted that, "if necessary, the police must use force." Francisco Granados, of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), said that the protests "violate the interests of small businessmen".

This gave the green light for further police brutality. On Thursday, thousands marched on the Gran Vía and on to the Ministry of Interior. The police charged them, leaving 20 injured. Four arrests were made, including Gorka Ramos, a journalist for the internet-based *LaInformacion.com*.

In a video, Ramos describes how police "hit me with the baton on the waist". When he sought to see the identification number of the policemen involved—which they are legally meant to wear, although they do not—"they hit me in the face" and "knocked me down on the floor". (See the video [here](#))

Raquel, an 88-year-old woman, told the daily *El País* that nothing happened until the police charged. She has had her hand plastered and has bruises on her knees. Luis López Díez, an economics student, had his head bandaged after a "wild" policeman split from his anti-riot unit and opened his head with a baton.

Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, the ruling Spanish Socialist Workers Party' (PSOE) prime ministerial candidate, supported the police action. He declared, "200 people cannot turn a city upside down".

The next day the police relaxed the enclosure of Puerta del Sol, after three days of occupation. Even then, barriers and a dozen police vans were left in the

adjacent streets.

On Friday at noon, 4,000 *indignados* of all ages demonstrated in Puerta del Sol. Solidarity protests were also held in Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Santiago, Burgos, Las Palmas and Tenerife against the police violence and the eviction of the main square.

In Barcelona, 700 protestors marched through the center of the city towards Plaza Catalunya, the main square in Barcelona, chanting “guilty, guilty” when passing the banks, trade union offices and the police headquarters.

The police violence took place just days after Socialist Workers Party Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez called an early election for November 20. The ruling class hopes to use the elections to divert popular opposition to the PSOE’s austerity measures, while preparing the way for an administration considered strong enough to enforce further unpopular cuts.

But the banks and major financial institutions are demanding even greater attacks on workers and youth in advance of the election. The protests took place as stock markets plunged across the world, with IBEX-35, Spain’s principal stock market index, losing up to 51 billion euros (or 10 percent of its market capitalization) in five days.

It was the worst week for the Spanish economy since the economic crisis erupted in 2008. The Spanish government now must pay more than six percent interest on its ten-year debt.

Zapatero had to cancel his holiday break due to the crisis. It is reported that he is in “intense” conversations with European leaders, including French President Nicholas Sarkozy, Italy’s Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and European Union Commission President Barroso.

The Economist attacked the PP’s Mariano Rajoy—considered most likely to win the November election—for stating that he did “not intend to make social cuts”. He was offering “something that stretches

credibility: austerity without pain”, it complained.

The PP and the Catalan nationalist *Convèrgencia I Unió* have called for the election to be brought even further forward. Gonzalez Pons, the PP’s General Vice-Secretary of Communication said Spain “cannot live more weeks like this. We cannot pay the debt at the price we are paying... The later we react, the more severe the consequences.”

José Bono, the President of Congress and a member of the PSOE, has called for a coalition government between the PSOE and PP. “It is patriotic to understand each other”, he said. “Spain is more important than PSOE and PP”.

Meanwhile the catastrophic effects of the austerity measures already implemented are becoming more apparent. In the Catalonia region, the 15 percent reduction in primary health care funding by the regional government has meant that 165 health clinics will face severe cut-backs and even closure.

In Castilla-La-Mancha region, pharmacists have declared that they will have to close down because of the non-payment of 125 million euros owed to them by the regional government.

The regional governments, whose total debt is put at 121.42 billion euros, some 11.4 percent of national GDP, have announced further attacks on the social conditions of the population. On Saturday they declared that they are preparing a cut in spending of five billion euros.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact