

Savage police assault on students in Valencia, Spain

Alejandro López
24 February 2012

A February 20 demonstration by students and schoolchildren in the Spanish city of Valencia was subject to a violent attack by police. The city was flooded with police, who made 43 arrests, including eight minors. Dozens were injured.

This was the fourth demonstration since protests first began outside Lluís Vives public school last week, after a young student was detained by the police. Police have attacked students, parents, teachers and even passersby with batons and rubber bullets.

The video images (see here) of police beating up students flashed across the Internet through the social networks, with Primavera de Valencia (Valencia's Spring) becoming the most commented on topic of the day.

The central Popular Party (PP) government reacted by sending another 150 policemen from Barcelona, Seville and Valladolid in case protests spread throughout the city.

The next day, thousands took to the streets in Valencia, with the most repeated mottos being "Our weapons are our books" and "Less police and more education".

Supporting demonstrations occurred in Alicante, Madrid's Sol square, Barcelona, Seville and elsewhere.

On Wednesday, another demonstration of 10,000 in Valencia and 2,000 in Alicante marched through the streets in defence of public education and to demand the resignation of the government delegate for the Valencia region.

The PP has tried to attribute violence to the students and defended police claims that they were "insulted", "spat on" and "bitten".

Interior Minister Jorge Fernández Díaz initially said that the police may have used "some excessive force" during the clashes with students. But hours later, he

said he had really meant that "excesses" were committed by "radicals". The police union SUP had called the minister's initial statement an example of "political and personal cowardice".

Sánchez de León, the government delegate in Valencia, described the police brutality as a simple "anecdote".

In reality, the savage repression mounted against peaceful demonstrators, including children, is the answer of the ruling elite to any resistance to its austerity measures. Conscious that billions of euros of cuts will lead to growing resistance, the aim is to intimidate workers and broad layers of the population entering into struggle.

Valencia is one of the most indebted areas of Spain, with the regional government's credit rating recently reduced to junk status. It is infamous for excessive expenditure on projects of dubious value that has given rise to allegations of corruption—including a Formula One European Grand Prix street circuit with an annual cost of €20 million (US\$26.8 million); an airport with no planes that cost €150 million; and the City of Lights—a movie studio with a debt of €190 million.

Regional President Alberto Fabra recently announced that he would reduce the 2012 budget by €1,500 million—affecting health, education and social security services. The previous president was forced to resign after his links with the Gürtel case—the largest corruption case in Spain in 40 years, centred in Valencia—were exposed.

Primary and secondary schools have been deprived of heating and lighting during a period of intense cold. Teachers have had their pay cut by 5 percent, and posts remain unfilled once teachers leave or retire. School infrastructure is deteriorating. In January, a student was expelled from Almassora Vila secondary public school

for publishing a photo of his fellow students wearing blankets and jackets in the classroom.

The police are being given carte blanche to attack workers and youth. Just last week, PP prime minister Mariano Rajoy signed an amnesty for five Mossos d'Esquadra (the Catalan regional police) convicted by the Supreme Court of torture, injuries, abuse and illegal detention. In 2011, the former Socialist Party (PSOE) government pardoned three officers for beating up a man in a police station.

The government has also permitted the police to stop wearing their identification numbers visibly on their uniforms, as required by law. Police often can no longer be identified, with many wearing balaclavas.

The most striking comment came from the chief of police in Valencia, Antonio Moreno. He refused to give details regarding the number of policemen deployed to break the demonstrations, alleging that he was unwilling to “give that information to the enemy”.

The use of the term “enemy” to describe secondary school students aged 16 to 18 who were blocking roads is a measure of how sharp class antagonisms in Spain have become.

The treatment meted out to the students, parents and teachers of Valencia is a foretaste of what awaits the whole Spanish working class. The plans to cut an additional €20 billion, following the €16 billion in cuts passed last December, will mean destroying public services, slashing wages and ending benefits.

The government's acquisition of tear gas and smoke grenades valued at nearly €1.5 million for the Civil Guard is an indication of what is being prepared. The Civil Guard is a paramilitary force infamous for its brutal repressive role before and during the civil war and as executioners at the command of the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. This new anti-riot weaponry will probably go to the Grupo de Reserva y Seguridad unit (Reserve and Security Group) set up in 2006, whose stated mission is “the restoration of public order in large mass demonstrations”.

* * *

Laura Almenara witnessed the police riot in Valencia. She told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

“I pass through the area every day to go to class, and that day [Monday] I saw three police vans and about 20 police standing there with riot helmets, shields and batons.

“I saw about 500 or 600 kids in the distance with their schoolbags, blocking one of the main arteries of Valencia, Xativa Street. The rest happened so fast. The riot police ran after us, pushing us and trying to break up the blockade. Before we knew it, we were surrounded by more than 20 vans and about 70 policemen armed with rifles with rubber bullets.

“The first charge by police was in the North Station, where they arrested the first teenager of the day. It was then, when people tried to prevent his arrest, that they began to beat us. They had no hesitation about beating us on the head with batons. We did not give them any reason to do so, and even less to do it with such cruelty.

“I remember the big laugh they had among themselves. Above all, I remember when they stood in front of us tapping their batons on our knees. I saw how they hit a teen in the mouth, how they threw a worker who was passing by to the ground and then hit him, how two policemen repeatedly beat a young girl.

“It was a real witch-hunt. It is true that there was verbal abuse of the police by demonstrators and that two people threw four stones—these images would later be repeated on all the media. But that is no reason to do what they did. A schoolmate who was detained for 24 hours has a broken knee and his body is covered with bruises. They were just kids.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact