

# Protests against austerity continue in Spain

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Further protests against cuts in education and police violence were held in Valencia Wednesday, as well as in Catalonia and the capital, Madrid. In the Basque Country and Castilla-la-Mancha, civil servants held demonstrations against cuts and redundancies.

In Valencia around 20,000 students took the streets starting from the Lluís Vives public school. This was the site of a peaceful demonstration nine days before by high school students that was savagely repressed, with the city flooded with police who made 43 arrests, including eight minors, and injured dozens.

In Barcelona, Spain's second largest city, tens of thousands of student protesters marched from the universities located in the outskirts towards the centre. Marching down the main road through the city's Diagonal Avenue, protestors threw stones and paint at the banks and stock exchange.

Police responded by dispersing the crowds with batons and threatened to use rubber bullets. This YouTube video shows how police vans arrive at the scene of the protests and beat several students at random.

In the city centre, demonstrators converged in the University Square next to the old University of Barcelona building. There the police again tried to disperse the students, this time firing rubber bullets.

Some protesters reacted by erecting barricades with rubbish containers and setting them alight, causing a blaze to destroy at least one car and motorbikes. Students also hurled rocks at more banks.

During the afternoon, protesters gathered near the site of the Mobile World Congress, which has an annual attendance of approximately 60,000 people from more than 200 countries. The police charged and arrested 12 people.

At 6.00pm, a demonstration of around 10,000 people, mostly civil servants from education and health care,

was held next to the Catalan parliament. It was called by the main trade unions, CC.OO and UGT, against the cuts made by the regional government.

Another two spontaneous protests were held before nightfall. One went to the main police station calling out "freedom for detainees". Another occupied the historical building of the University of Barcelona. The occupation has continued and the police have threatened to intervene.

In Madrid and Alicante, thousands of students protested. In Madrid, it was the eighth demonstration since September against the cuts. In the Basque Country and Castilla-la Mancha, smaller protests were held by civil servants.

The media reacted by repeatedly transmitting images of the police confrontations and riots that took place in Barcelona, attempting to brand all the protestors as violent thugs.

The Popular Party (PP) government expressed fears that the latest protests will affect the interest rates on the Spanish debt. Justice Minister Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón said, "These images from Barcelona are the epitome of what we have become. They have really hurt us and probably have cost us lots of jobs and lots of investment opportunities."

The PP has attempted to portray the opposition Socialist Party (PSOE) as being behind the protests, claiming it as an attempt to destabilize the government: "We would like to ask [Socialist Party leader] Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, if at all possible, to explicitly reject the violence that has broken out on the streets of our country," stated PP organizational secretary Carlos Floriano.

The next day the newspapers were filled with sensationalist front pages. The right-wing Catholic newspaper *La Razón* and the monarchist *ABC* accused the PSOE of being "behind the protests".

Meanwhile, the CC.OO and UGT announced that

they were considering calling a general strike for either March 29 or April 19 in an attempt to supposedly influence the debate over labour reforms that have already passed.

“We do not want the same thing that happened in 2010 to be repeated, when we staged a strike in September after the parliamentary debate had already concluded,” said a union spokesman. But that is precisely what they are doing.

Spain is in the midst of a deep economic crisis with a negative growth rate for this year.

Unemployment in Spain rose by 2.44 percent (112,269 people) in February. One reason for this is the latest labour reform that makes it easier to impose redundancies. The total number of unemployed now stands at 4,712,098, while the unemployment rate for people aged 16 to 24 stands at nearly 50 percent.

The PP is yet to set the new budget for 2012, which is expected to have further drastic cuts. The regions are also implementing huge cuts, especially in education and health care.



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