

The repression against workers and youth in Spain

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Last week's general strike in Spain displayed the readiness of the working class to resist the austerity measures being imposed by the right-wing Popular Party (PP) government, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

The fierce repression meted out by the police during the strike and its aftermath is a warning of the ruling elite's response to this mass outpouring of defiance.

In Catalonia, the police made 79 arrests and injured 100 people. This is the region that has imposed the largest cuts in health care and education and which is considered the "laboratory" for austerity measures that are to be forced through elsewhere.

According to the weekly *La Directa*, "the security deployed during the strike was made up of 9,385 agents, 60 percent of the body". These included the entire Mobile Brigade, consisting of more than 400 "anti-riot" agents.

They unleashed rubber bullets, smoke grenades and tear gas against demonstrators. The gas was deployed for the first time in 16 years, against dozens of firemen when they demanded police stop shooting rubber bullets into the crowd in the center of Barcelona. Plainclothes police using surveillance and helicopters were also deployed.

One youth suffered three broken ribs and a pierced lung after being shot by a rubber bullet. Another youth lost one eye and another has had to have his spleen removed. Some 19 people were hospitalized with multiple injuries, including seven caused by police rubber bullets. Dozens more were hospitalized from the effects of the smoke grenades and tear gas. A wheelchair-bound man protesting the police actions was arrested for "public disorder",

Eight minors were held overnight by police before being released. Forty-one others have been charged.

Two students and a member of El Clot Assembly (a local neighbourhood committee), remain in prison. The two students are being accused of public disorder, damage

to public property and attacking policemen and other "agents of authority".

They are being prosecuted for involvement in the disturbances that took place during the afternoon of the strike, even though they were arrested in the morning.

The police claim this is justified because the two are part of a group that was involved in the later disturbances. The authorities argue that they should be kept in jail to prevent them from further involvement in "anti-system activities", specifically protests planned around the European Central Bank summit in Barcelona on May 3.

The claim that a person can be imprisoned for a crime that they might commit in the future amounts to preventive detention.

This sinister development is the latest in a long line of repressive measures employed by the ruling elite since the economic crisis started in 2008.

They were first pioneered by the social democratic Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government in December 2010, which used the military against striking air traffic controllers, who were fighting a 50 percent pay cut and attacks on their working conditions.

In May 2011, police fired rubber bullets and beat anti-austerity demonstrators peacefully occupying Barcelona's Plaza de Catalunya square. The following month, police violently dispersed a demonstration outside the Catalan parliament as it approved cuts to education and healthcare.

The PP is extending this assault. Prior to the general strike, students and schoolchildren demonstrating in February against education cuts in Valencia were subject to violent police attacks after the regional head of police described them as "the enemy".

In each instance, the right-wing media has cheered on the repression, demanding the powers that be go even further, and attempting to mobilise fascistic forces against the anti-austerity resistance.

The *ABC* newspaper, for example, which has supported every reactionary and fascist regime in Spain since it was founded in 1903, published the names of individuals and organizations it accused of inciting opposition to the government, targeting members of “the 15-M [movement], ecologists and radicals”.

In line with these demands, Catalan Interior regional minister, Felip Puig, announced Tuesday that the anarcho-syndicalist CNT and CGT trade unions are to be prosecuted for the disturbances during the general strike and proposed that legislation protecting the right to assembly be revised.

A web site is to be set up where “citizens will be able to identify the violent ones”, he said. This is to be coupled with more stringent ID checks, the recruitment of 100 more anti-riot police and what Puig described as greater coordination with police forces across Europe in tracking down “anti-system” protestors.

The Minister of Interior, Jorge Fernández Díaz, has already said that the government intends to change the law so that anti-terrorist legislation utilised against the Basque separatists can be applied to public disorder.

Under conditions where the Mariano Rajoy government is imposing 27 billion euros in budget cuts, with the aim of slashing the public deficit from 8.5 percent of GDP to 5.3 percent this year, the ruling class in Spain and across Europe are well aware that this cannot be imposed by democratic means.

What they intend is already apparent in Greece, where for the last five years workers and youth have been subject to one round after another of spending cuts and tax rises, each more vicious than the last, without any end in sight.

In Spain, as throughout Europe, the working class faces a fight for political power against the bourgeoisie and its representatives—including the trade unions.

Austerity and the moves towards dictatorial rule can only be defeated through the fight for a workers government, based on socialist policies.



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