

# Offensive against democratic rights continues in Spain

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Spain's Popular Party government is meeting opposition to austerity measures totalling over €50 billion (US\$66 billion) with escalating repression.

In March, the response to these austerity measures culminated in a general strike, with the whole country paralyzed and millions of workers on the streets. Some 180 arrests were made, more than half in the north-eastern region of Catalonia, which has imposed the fiercest cuts. Added to this, more than 100 demonstrators were injured by rubber bullets, smoke grenades and teargas, used for the first time in 16 years.

In the following weeks, selective arrests have been made of protesters and workers who participated in the general strike.

Last Wednesday two trade union delegates were arrested at SEAT's Martorell factory on the outskirts of Barcelona. They represented the two largest trade unions, the UGT and CC.OO.

According to the Internet-based newspaper *Directa*, "The police escorted them out of the factory. Then they were handcuffed and put in a vehicle. ... Javier Pacheco, in charge of CC.OO SEAT, reported that the outcry was such that a large group of workers headed for the police station to call for the release of the two workers. ... Minutes after 16.00 hours, and when there were over a hundred workers in front of the police station, the police released the two trade unionists."

On the same day, the secretary of organization of the CGT in Barcelona was arrested when she left home. She has been sent to "preventive prison", supposedly for starting a fire in front of the stock exchange in Barcelona.

In the same region, the Interior Minister of Catalonia set up the web site for "citizens to identify violent persons."

The web site posted 68 photographs, including two

pictures of minors, which the police then removed. The Interior Department said that during the first 24 hours there were 140,000 visits to the site, but did not give details of the number of people who have been identified. According to *Directa*, an unnamed official stated that such identifications had been "very low". It seems that the "citizens" are not willing to co-participate in the state repression and attack on democratic rights

The repression has increased in Catalonia, where a meeting of the European Central Bank is set for May 3 in Barcelona.

Spain has already temporarily suspended the Schengen Treaty, strengthened its border controls and is preparing to deploy 6,500 policemen in the city in order to prevent anti-ECB protesters at the summit. They will no doubt have at their disposal digital records to prevent protesters coming from other European countries. In Madrid, Regional Premier Esperanza Aguirre is facing problems from the "Toma el Metro" movement (Take the Metro movement), a group protesting the 29 percent price hike in Metro tickets. Last week activists simultaneously stopped the entire Metro system in Madrid by pulling the emergency levers in 13 trains on nine separate lines at 8:30 a.m., causing short delays to 8,000 passengers.

Three people were arrested the next day and the police have announced that further detentions are not ruled out. The detainees, accused by the regional government of *kale borroka* (urban street violence organised by the Basque separatist ETA), face fines of up to €30,000 and jail terms of up to five years.

The clampdown by the ruling elite will no doubt intensify, especially given their fear of the impact of the worsening recession on the class struggle. The latest statistics show a record 5.6 million unemployed and

Spain officially back in recession, with its economy having shrunk by 0.3 percent over the three months to the end of March, the second quarterly contraction.

The minister of the interior intends to tighten all public order offences. Among the new features will be designating “peaceful resistance” as an “assault on authority”. The government also intends to change the law so that anti-terrorist legislation utilised against the Basque separatists can be employed to enforce public order.

Anyone calling “violent” demonstrations through the Internet and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) will be considered as having “membership in a criminal organization.”

More stringent ID checks, the recruitment of 100 more anti-riot police for the Catalan police and greater coordination with police forces across Europe in tracking down “anti-system” protesters will also be introduced.

Unions, political parties and other organisations will be held responsible if their members cause “violence or vandalise property during demonstrations and public protests”. Parents of minors caught committing violent acts or damaging property will be held responsible.



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