

Spanish miners' "black march" attacked in Madrid

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On the night of Wednesday, July 11, 200 mine workers from northern Spain arrived in Madrid. The arrival of the so-called "black march" was welcomed by more than 25,000 people, who sided with the strikers and demonstrated together with them through the centre of the Spanish capital.

When the demonstration reached the Industry Ministry to place its demands it was brutally attacked. Riot police fired rubber bullets into the crowd, injuring 76 people, two miners were arrested as well as 16 demonstrators. Ignoring the demands of the workers, the government announced cuts of €65 billion (\$79 billion).

Thousands of supporters greeted the marchers with cries of "champions", declaring that they were the pride of working class struggle. The march was joined by fire fighters as well as teachers protesting against cuts to education.

A number of newspapers have reported that the demonstration was peaceful before the police attacked. Olvidio Gonzalez, a retired 67-year-old miner from the northern area of Asturia, told the *Washington Post*, "We walked the whole route peacefully. When we arrived in Madrid, we were met by the police." He added, "They opened fire on us without any warning." The web site of *El Pais*, Spain's largest newspaper, showed photos of women being arrested with their faces bloodied.

The central government delegate in Madrid, Christina Cifuentes, on Thursday praised the security forces for their attacks and labelled most of those arrested as "anti-system radicals". She claimed that the police had carried out a "robust action against violent elements that wanted to turn Madrid into Athens."

Behind the brutal attacks of the police and the belligerent stance of the government of Mariano Rajoy stands the European Union, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund and the international banks they represent. Confronted with a deepening economic crisis in Europe and the ongoing pressure of financial markets, the Spanish and European elite cannot and will not retreat from their program of cuts and austerity.

The miners' march set out from coal mining regions across Spain—Asturias, León, Palencia and Aragon—after the right-wing Rajoy government refused to take back the 64 percent cut in subsidies to the coal industry. The cuts are threatening 50,000 jobs in mining and related occupations. Since the end of May, 8,000 miners have been on strike, blocking streets and railroads while fighting against the repression of riot police.

Although the miners' march gained widespread support from the working class and Spanish population, it was not a genuine show of opposition by the unions. Before the government announced cuts to mining subsidies through 2014, the two main unions, the CCOO and UGT, had already accepted an end to subsidies through 2018. The unions supported the march of the miners because they want to maintain control over the militant struggle to subordinate it to their cynical demand for concessions from the EU-backed government.

By ignoring the miners' demands and announcing cuts the same day, the government made clear that it is not willing to make any concessions. The trade unions are fully aware of this. For this reason, the secretaries general of the UGT and CCOO labour unions, Cándido Méndez and Ignacio Toxo, who marched behind the leading miners, criticised the government not for the cuts, but for bringing the conflict upon itself by acting with "injustice,

insensitivity and a complete lack of intelligence”. For the unions, it would be better to destroy tens of thousands of jobs in a “sensitive” and “intelligent” way.

The unions have good reason to fear losing control. Less than 24 hours after Prime Minister Rajoy announced the new cuts of \$79 billion, an “outpouring of rage” of mainly public-sector workers took place through the streets of Madrid. As reported by *El Pais*, “The Labour unions had called their members to arms for a mass protest on Thursday but many could not wait.” Hundreds went to the streets shouting, “Cowards, cowards!” “Hands up, this is a robbery!” and “Rajoy, resign!” They stopped traffic on some of the capital’s main thoroughfares, including Genova Street, where the ruling Popular Party has its headquarters.

An employee at the Merchant Marine department of the Public Works Ministry said that 50 percent of the people on the demonstration earn only €900 a month. She explained that this means “a disaster” for the people. Frightened by this spontaneous outrage, the leaders of the CCOO and UGT warned the government about “a hot autumn” and spoke in favour of a public sector strike any time in September.

The right-wing Rajoy government counts on the unions to suppress working class resistance. Government delegate Cifuentes, who praised the police brutality, asked the unions after the Wednesday and Thursday demonstrations to be “a little more responsible at a moment of extreme delicacy for the country. Also because of the economic situation ... that union leaders have contributed to by supporting all of the policies of the previous Socialist government.”



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