

Mass demonstrations against Spain's latest austerity package

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On Monday morning, a demonstration of thousands blocked the centre of Madrid, marking the fifth day of protests by workers against the latest round of austerity measures. These demonstrations have not been called by the unions, but have erupted spontaneously.

Firefighters, police in civilian clothes and civil servants attempted to march on the Spanish parliament and clashed with riot police.

Last Wednesday's announcement of a third austerity package, totaling 65 billion euros (\$80 billion), sparked mass protests in a country already suffering 23 percent unemployment and more than 50 percent joblessness among youth. One governing Popular Party (PP) deputy, Andrea Fabra, reportedly clapped and yelled "f__k them all" as Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced cuts in unemployment benefits.

The PP government also announced a rise in value-added tax (VAT) of up to 13 percent on some consumer goods and services such as dentistry, optical care, funeral services, hairdressing, the cinema and theatre. Other provisions included the deregulation of air and railroad transportation and complete flexibility in regard to retail store hours, a measure that will destroy the livelihoods of small shopkeepers.

The Ministry of Finance has estimated that the VAT rise will cost 437 euros (\$538) per year for each family.

On the day the measures were announced, more than 25,000 people welcomed the "black march" of 200 miners from the northern regions of Spain. The march and demonstration were brutally repressed by the special anti-riot police when they reached the Ministry of Industry, leaving 76 injured and 18 arrested.

(
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu1qbHDTZMU&feature=related>)

At night, the police charged again. Dozens were

injured. A group of teenagers and tourists waiting in a queue outside a cinema were hit with batons. For nearly an hour the center of Madrid was blocked by the police.

On Thursday, civil servants spontaneously stopped traffic in some of Madrid's main streets. Another group marched to the headquarters of the PP in Génova Street, while another group of 200 went to the prime minister's residence at Moncloa Palace.

Civil servants have been especially hard hit by the latest measures, which include the elimination of their Christmas bonus, which accounts for 7 percent of their yearly pay, a reduction in personal days, and a cut in sick pay. These measures are on top of the 5 percent to 15 percent cut in wages imposed by the previous Socialist Party (PSOE) government.

In the evening, some 500 policemen and firefighters demonstrated in front of parliament. The protest was called through Twitter and Facebook, without any trade union involvement. One firefighter told *Diagonal* newspaper, "We are angry because we have lost 30 percent of our income."

On Friday, civil servants again demonstrated and set up roadblocks. The demonstrators included nurses, doctors, teachers and university professors, who are suffering from cuts in health care and education.

In another part of the capital, Ana Botella, mayor of Madrid and wife of former Prime Minister José María Aznar, was jeered at by public-sector workers.

In the evening, a new demonstration consisting of thousands

(
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70U1MPx0Xn8&feature=player_embedded) and called through social networks was staged in front of the PP headquarters. The police charged. The demonstrators moved to the PSOE headquarters and then to parliament, where a line

of policemen and double line fences were set up. The main chants were, “Resign!”, “Listen Mariano [Rajoy], you will not survive the summer”, “The next unemployed will be a deputy”, “This happens to us because of a fascist government” and “PSOE-PP, the same s__t”.

In Barcelona, more than 400 people holding homemade banners and shouting, “Resign,” marched to the main PP office. They attempted to go to the home of Catalan Regional President Artur Mass, but police prevented them. Similar protests were held in Malaga, Valencia and other cities.

On Sunday, hundreds of civil servants again demonstrated near the parliament. At night, thousands again marched, shouting, “Hands up! This is a robbery” and “Less crucifixes and more permanent jobs.”

On the same day, the PP was forced to close their 13th Regional Congress in Andalusia earlier than scheduled. Rajoy had arrived ahead of schedule to avoid civil servants waiting for him with homemade banners.

The latest demonstrations once again show the readiness of the working class to fight against the austerity measures. Since the crisis erupted in 2008, governments of both the PSOE and PP have imposed billions of euros in cuts, gutting public health care and education. They have carried out labour “reforms” ripping up job security provisions and other protections for workers.

According to the latest study by the Catholic charity Caritas, poverty levels in Spain are rivaling those experienced in post-World War II Europe. Over 11 million people could fall below the poverty threshold.

Already, 22 percent of Spanish households are living below the poverty line, with a further 30 percent facing serious difficulties making ends meet. Some 580,000 Spaniards, nearly 3.3 percent of the population, receive no income whatsoever. There are 30,000 homeless people across the country.

For the first time, according to UNICEF, there are more children than people over 65 living in situations of deprivation. The number of children below the poverty line has risen by 10 percent since 2008. Of the 205,000 children affected, 13.7 percent live in families with a total income of less than 11,000 euros. Only Bulgaria and Romania exceed this figure within the European Union.

The two main union federations, the UGT (General

Union of Workers) and the CC.OO (Workers’ Commissions), have reacted to the worst cuts since Franco’s dictatorship merely by stating that a general strike “might be inevitable” and demanding the government submit the cuts to a referendum. The CSI-F (Independent Trade Union Confederation of Public Servants), the main union of public-sector workers, published a statement calling for a one-day general strike at the end of September—two months after the cuts come into effect. The UGT and the CC.OO have called a demonstration for July 19, when the budget is to be voted on, involving only public-sector workers.



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