

Thousands demonstrate in Madrid against austerity

Alejandro López
18 September 2012

On Saturday, firefighters, doctors, nurses, postal employees and others suffering the austerity measures and destruction of labour rights imposed by the Popular Party (PP) government, marched through the Spanish capital, Madrid.

The demonstration was called by Cumbre Social (Social Summit), an umbrella group consisting of 200 organisations. It involves numerous trade unions (including those of the police, Guardia Civil and military), small business platforms, consumer organisations, feminists, and others.

Despite the broad sweep of Cumbre Social, however, the much publicised event did not convene “the hundreds of thousands of citizens... from all corners of the Spanish geography” that the trades unions had hoped.

The national protest attracted 65,000 people. This is under conditions where more than five million people are unemployed. In 1.7 million families, no adult is working. Social inequality is rising to levels not seen since the days of the Franco dictatorship, with everyday living costs like heating, electricity, clothes and food becoming more expensive.

There is widespread anger at the government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. On Monday, a strike by public transport workers led to massive delays for commuters. Intercity services and high-speed train services operating in and out of Madrid and Barcelona were cancelled in the protest against the restructuring of the rail network. Subway workers in both cities also struck in the rush-hour against wage cuts.

But Cumbre Social is not aimed at a mobilisation against the PP. Designed by the main trade unions—the Workers Commissions (CC.OO) and the General Workers Union (UGT)—its aim is to divert workers away from a political struggle against Spain’s ruling

elite and its allies in the European Union into the dead end of the demand for a referendum on spending cuts.

The main manifesto for the event stated that the protest aimed at pressuring the government “to call a referendum on the [austerity] measures passed.” “If not,” it continued, “the organisations of Cumbre Social will be the ones which carry out popular referendum.”

The CC.OO general secretary, Ignacio Fernández Toxo told the rally that, “the prime minister has the key to stop this general strike.” Cándido Méndez, secretary general of the UGT, added: “If the government doesn’t pay attention to us, we will come up with another answer or mobilisation.”

Just as elsewhere in Europe, the pseudo-left groups are playing the role of loyal advisors to the trade union bureaucracy and its diversionary tactics.

ATTAC, Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left), Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth Without a Future) and others set up a “Critical Anti-Debt Bloc” at the end of the demonstration.

This calls for the establishment of a “debt audit commission ... as a previous step to canceling the whole illegitimate debt.”

Miguel Urbán, one of the leaders of Izquierda Anticapitalista, said that Spain’s public debt was the main issue because it “is the knot of the crisis and if it is not broken we will not get out of this one.” He continued saying that they have “a different discourse [with Cumbre Social] but only in order to converge with the unions on the streets.”

The pseudo-left’s talk of a “debt audit” has nothing progressive to it, let alone socialist. Its objective is not for workers and youth to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism, but to encourage the dangerous illusion that each nation state and its ruling elite can, through pressure, be made to eliminate “bad debt” and re-

organise the profit system in a more “rational” way.

This bankrupt perspective was piloted in Greece by the pseudo-left SYRIZA organisation, led by Alexis Tsipras. On this basis, SYRIZA has been faithful to its pledge after June’s elections to act as a loyal opposition to the right-wing, New Democracy-led coalition, even while the government has set out even more savage spending cuts in line with the demands of the “troika”—the EU, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Similarly in Spain, while the unions and pseudo-left groups speak of “referendums,” the PP government has committed itself to further “structural reforms” by the end of the month.

In advance of the demonstration, Spain’s Economy Minister Luis de Guindos said that “important announcements” on these measures would be made in the next days.

Also on Friday, the Bank of Spain announced that the country’s public debt in the second quarter surpassed 800 billion euros for the first time ever. The figure was equivalent to 75.9 percent of GDP, three points more than last year, and the highest ratio since 1913 when it stood at 77 percent.

Of a total debt of 804.388 billion euros, 617.504 billion was central government debt, equivalent to 58.3 percent of GDP, an increase of 2.6 points in the quarter. Regional debt amounted to 150.578 billion euros, with the debt/GDP ratio rising to 14.2 percent from 13.8 percent.

Without a doubt the troika and the Spanish government will use these figures as a pretext to continue with their savage austerity measures.

The European Central Bank has already stated that Spain’s public debt could exceed 100 percent of GDP, if the government fails to fulfill its fiscal adjustment commitments to bring the deficit back within the European Union’s ceiling of three percent of GDP.

Spain has pledged to lower the public deficit from 8.5 percent of GDP last year to 6.3 percent this year and to 4.5 percent in 2013.

The Rajoy government is also weighing up whether to ask for a second bailout. Several euro zone officials speculated that a Spanish application could come on October 8, in time for the next meeting of euro zone finance ministers. Such a scenario would mean more drastic austerity measures.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact