

Spain's Popular Party faces wave of strikes and demonstrations

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Last Tuesday, President Joan Rosell of the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations (CEOE) stated, "When people from outside ask us why there has not been a social explosion with six million unemployed, we explain to them that two-thirds receive unemployment benefits and that the rest are in the informal sector."

He made no mention of the role in suppressing opposition played by the trade unions or leaders of movements such as the *indignados*, who insist on a no-politics perspective.

Nevertheless, a social explosion is brewing in Spain. There have been at least 27 demonstrations since the beginning of 2013, according to data compiled by *Europa Press*—an increase of 68 percent compared with last year. More than 95,000 state security forces have been deployed against them.

Last week, thousands of teachers and students joined the second general strike against spending cuts in education and the latest Education Law. According to the unions, 72 percent of teachers in public institutions and 25 percent in the private sector took part. The Students' Union said 90 percent of university students joined in.

The strike was the culmination of two weeks of demonstrations that have seen hundreds of occupations, vigils and all manner of other mobilisations at educational institutions across Spain.

It is estimated that the cuts by the central government and the regional governments, which control the education budget, now total more than €3 billion, mostly used to bail out the banks and finance the interest on public debt. According to the CC OO union, the number of workers in education has been cut by 11.5 percent since 2009—some 62,000. At the same time, there has been an increase of more than 600,000

students in non-university education.

The strike was called by the Platform for Public Schooling, which includes a number of unions (CC OO, FETE-UGT, STES), the CEAPA parents' association and the Students' Union. The last two organisations have done everything possible to subordinate students and staff to the leadership of the unions. These in turn have done everything they can to channel the opposition towards empty one-day protests and strikes, promoting the political deception that that the Popular Party (PP) government will reverse its policy if sufficient pressure is exerted.

The unions are, in fact, not against cuts—only that they have been imposed, as the CC OO education cuts report complains, "without any debate with the education community".

The unions have been playing the same role in the struggle by doctors, nurses and health care workers in Madrid against cuts and the privatisation of the region's health care system. The regional PP government plans to privatise 20 large public hospitals and 27 health centres—10 percent of the total. The region is also feeling the effects of the €7 billion cut in health spending imposed by the national PP government. The Spanish health care system, once rated seventh best in the world by the World Health Organisation, is being gutted using the pretext of the economic crisis and the need to comply with the deficit target.

Five major "white tide" demonstrations, named after the colour of the medical scrubs, have been held in Madrid this year. The latest surveys show that more than 70 percent of the Spanish population reject any privatisation of their health care system.

The unions have confined this mass struggle by health care workers and patients to one-day protests,

petition signing and hospital occupations. Not only have they isolated health care workers from their counterparts in other regions, but they have also prevented any unity of workers and unemployed in all sectors of society against the cuts.

No better example of the bankruptcy of pressure politics can be found than the *indignados* movement. Last week, on the eve of the second anniversary of the May 15 (15-M) protest movement, which began with the occupation of Madrid's central Puerta del Sol square, demonstrations took place in many cities across Spain.

Esther Vivas, spokesperson of the Anti-capitalist Left (Izquierda Anticapitalista—IA), and one of the main cheerleaders of the *indignados* movement, wrote in *Público* that the 15-M movement was “a cry of indignation against those who sell our rights to the highest bidder.” Two years later, she continued, in the shape of the movement against evictions (Mortgage Victims Platform—PAH), “We have passed from indignation to awareness of the power we have”.

Continuing with her panegyric, Vivas said the 15-M movement “has mutated into countless fronts against the crisis. It has become a sea of infinite colours and tides. Those who occupied the squares now occupy empty houses, banks, universities and hospitals. Disobey, there is no other option.... And once the neighbourhood assemblies were dwindling, the PAH became a benchmark of struggle, as well as the tides in health, education, culture and increasingly in more areas.”

This is Vivas's balance sheet of a movement that has completely failed. Two years after the eruption of the *indignados*, there are 6.2 million unemployed, 1.9 million households without a single breadwinner, around 21.8 percent of the Spanish population (10 million people) classified as poor, an 8.5 percent decline in wages, and inequality not seen since the Franco era.

The PAH, which Vivas calls the “greatest exponent of the change of perception of those below,” is the prime example of the failure of pressure politics. The platform claimed that the PP government could be pressured to update Spain's eviction laws by a petition that received 1.5 million signatures over a three-year period. Instead, the PP introduced a Bill that included none of the demands.

During the passage of the Bill, the PAH attempted to keep up the pressure with a direct-action campaign of public denunciations of individual politicians outside their homes under the slogan “Yes we can.... But they don't want to.” Now, they are sowing illusions in the European Court of Justice, which merely declared the current eviction practice in Spain too “speedy” and a violation of European Union consumer protection laws.

Vivas typifies the affluent layer of academics, journalists, union officials and professional “activists” on which the pseudo-left parties are based, and who regard the crisis as an opportunity to integrate themselves deeper into the bourgeois state.

These groups are completely hostile to the working class. Their interventions in movements like the *indignados* and the PAH campaign aim to formulate impotent demands that make no real challenge to the status quo. Their interventions in workers' struggles are aimed at propping up their colleagues and fellow thinkers in the union bureaucracy as they isolate and betray their members.



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