

Spain: One million march in Madrid against austerity

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Under the banner “No more cuts!” hundreds of thousands of workers, pensioners and youth took to the streets Saturday in Spain’s capital, Madrid. They were demonstrating against austerity measures, evictions, unemployment and poverty.

The genesis of the demonstration was one month ago when eight columns of protesters, which organisers called the “Marches of Dignity”, set out from different cities across Spain to converge on Madrid. Hundreds of thousands more people joined on Saturday, travelling by train, cars and buses. According to organisers, the demonstration was 1 million strong.

The main organisers were the Andalusian Workers’ Union (Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores, SAT), the Movement of Mortgage Victims (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, PAH) and the Civic Front “We Are The Majority” (Frente Cívico Somos Mayoría, FCSM) of the former leader of the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU), Julio Anguita. Added to this, another 300 organisations supported the protesters, ranging from feminist groups, to pseudo-left parties such as Izquierda Anticapitalista, En Lucha and El Militante, to trade unions and anti-austerity organisations. They were joined by many organisations that emerged out of the mass “Indignados” protests of 2011.

Chants of “Rise! Rise! We will fight!”—“No to unemployment, no to exile, no to insecurity. March, march, march for dignity”—“What do we want? Work!” could be heard. One bloc of young protesters chanted, “No to unemployment, exile, or precariousness”.

Marchers held handmade placards denouncing the austerity measures of the ruling Popular Party (PP) government. In addition to red flags, there were flags of the Andalusian region, the Second Spanish Republic, and the anarcho-syndicalists. Many wore the T-shirts of

the anti-eviction organisation Stop Evictions (Stop Desahucios) and PAH, whilst many others wore green, white and blue T-shirts representing the social movements or “waves” against cuts in public services.

Protesters also chanted against laws and recent measures carried out by the government. Marchers shouted “Free unrestricted abortion!” directed at the Church and the government’s latest abortion law that will turn the clock back 30 years. Another chant was “no person is illegal” and “they did not die, they were murdered”, in reference to the 15 migrant workers who drowned on February 6 trying to reach Ceuta, the Spanish enclave in North Africa. Police shot over 150 rubber bullets at the migrants as they were trying to reach shore.

In addition to students, unemployed and pensioners, teachers, firemen, miners, health care workers, civil servants and many others participated. Factory workers from the on-going struggles in Panrico and Coca-Cola also marched in defence of their jobs.

At the end of the demonstration, a group of mostly young protesters clashed with police, throwing stones and firecrackers, as the police used tear gas and rubber bullets. Figures released by the emergency service said that 101 people were injured (67 of them police), and 27 arrested, three of them minors.

On the same day in Berlin, a solidarity protest was held by mostly Spanish youth forced to emigrate due to the economic conditions in Spain. Eva told the online newspaper *Público*, “We’re here because it’s important that they know they have the support of the exiles, of those of us who have been forced to leave. We are also here to fight for our right to return, because if things continue like they are it will be impossible.”

In anticipation of the demonstration, Madrid’s authorities closed down the centre of the city for 12

hours and mobilized 1,750 anti-riot police, in addition to the hundreds of National Police and other security forces. According to the organisers, 100 buses had been stopped and searched by the infamous Civil Guard before they reached Madrid.

The Madrid regional PP government immediately launched a smear campaign against the protesters. Madrid's premier, Ignacio González, provocatively declared, "The same things you find in their manifesto are also in the political programme of Golden Dawn, a Greek neo-Nazi group". On the same day, he stated, "Today the radical left is protesting on the streets. We hope that they do so as long as they don't destroy everything."

Even more provocative was the speech of his number two, the premier's adviser Salvador Victoria, who declared, "The Europe that will be drawn for the next few years should be seen as a reference of individual liberties against the threats of socialists, social-democrats and communists."

The latest demonstration once again shows the readiness of the working class to fight against the austerity measures. Since the crisis erupted in 2008, the PP government and its Socialist Party (PSOE) predecessor have imposed billions of euros in cuts, gutting public health care and education. They have imposed new labour laws facilitating redundancies, flexibility and destroying job security.

The class tensions in Spain are brewing a social explosion. Unemployment has risen to 6 million, (26 percent of the active population). Of these, 37 percent have lost all welfare benefits. Some 630,000 families now receive no income whatsoever. According to the NGO Caritas there are currently 3 million people living on less than €307 per month, whilst Eurostat confirms the existence of 13 million people (28 percent of the population) living in risk of poverty or social exclusion. In 2008 it was 23 percent.

This has led to resistance on the part of the workers and unemployed. An average of 27 protests are held every day and 184 strikes broke out between January and February amounting to 2,668,556 lost hours, an increase of nearly 6 percent from the same period the year before.

The support for official politics is at an all-time low. Polling for the PP and the PSOE has slumped to 32 percent and 26 percent respectively, the lowest joint-

turnout since the transition to democracy in 1978. The unions also fare badly. The latest poll shows that 24 percent of those who left the unions in the last year did so because these organizations "did not do anything", 19 percent because of "differences with other members", and 14 percent because "they were not important".

It is under these conditions that the recent mass demonstration must be put into context. The ruling class is depending ever more on the pseudo-left parties and social movements that organised Saturday's protests to channel disgruntled workers and unemployed into empty protests. Most of these groups orbit the Communist Party-led IU, which is imposing cuts in collaboration with the PSOE in the regional government of Andalusia. In two years, the regional government has cut health care by 10.8 percent and education by 8.6 percent, totalling €2.6 billion.

Workers must break with the bankrupt perspective of pressure politics being promoted by these organisations and people like Diego Canamero, spokesman of the SAT, one of the main organisers of the demonstration. In an interview before the march he stated that the main aim of the protest was to create "a tide of citizens that will restore the dignity of the capital", adding that "Either the government responds to our demands or it must pack its bags."



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