

Spanish military prepares for domestic repression

Vicky Short**20 November 2014**

In response to the socially explosive conditions resulting from high unemployment, attacks on living standards and rising inequality, Spanish military units are being prepared for use in internal repression.

The Spanish digital daily, *Público*, recently revealed that around 200 soldiers from the Light Armoured Cavalry Regiment Lusitania No.8, based in Valencia, have been receiving special crowd control training, including the use of anti-riot equipment, by the military police.

One of the participants said that “they never explained what mission we needed this training for”. Another said, “People think that a lot of tension can be seen in the streets every day, that there is a lot of unrest ... they tell us in the barracks that the National Police are overwhelmed, that it doesn’t have the means or the personnel.”

Sources at the barracks described the training as “strange and absolutely unprecedented,” but added, “We have to be prepared for everything, especially in these current times.”

“We do not remember the PM (military police) training soldiers before from other units to act as ‘anti-riot military police’ against civilians. ... We believe that the military police are also doing this type of training in other barracks,” another said.

The sources reported that the training exercise became so violent and out of control, with several casualties, that it had to be stopped.

The Ministry of Defence sought to downplay the revelations, stating that training of the army in riot control was routine and had been going on for years. However, this attempt at reassuring the public was belied by further reports that about 50 soldiers had been interrogated for hours by officers demanding that they reveal the names of those who had made the revelations. At least one of the soldiers is facing expulsion from the army.

The training of army units in crowd control is based on

the assumption that insurrectionary struggles are inevitable, because of the intolerable level of suffering the Spanish ruling class has imposed on the working class. The latest developments add to the series of counterinsurgency measures already adopted by the Popular Party (PP) government, including the purchase of new anti-riot equipment.

The new Citizens Security Law going through parliament and expected to be in force early next year will severely restrict the right to protest. Judges will be able to impose huge fines on protesters, particularly those outside Congress and other state institutions, and to fine anyone who distributes photographs of police brutality. The police will receive extra powers to enter and search property, demand identification papers and restrain those who refuse to produce them. The names and details of those penalised can be made public and if they are foreigners they can be deported.

Politicians from the main opposition Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) have been virtually silent about the *Público* reports, limiting themselves to putting down a question to the government asking for clarification. PSOE defence spokesman, Eduardo González, would not be drawn into any further comments other than stating, “What we need is to know more details and have some clear explanations”.

The PSOE is no stranger to using the army against the working class. In December 2010, the PSOE government invoked a “state of alarm” to use the army to force striking air traffic controllers, who were fighting against wage cuts and an increase in their hours of work, back to work. In 2005, former PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero created the Military Emergency Unit, whose declared role was “collaborating with the Civil Protection System and contributing to preserving the safety and welfare of citizens in disasters.” It is now one of the units undergoing crowd control training.

The historic role of the army in Spain, which in the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War killed hundreds of thousands in a counterrevolutionary uprising led by General Francisco Franco, is well documented. The Spanish establishment is riddled with the heirs of the fascist regime that followed the Civil War. A few old surviving fascists even continued to hold the same positions in the armed bodies of the state.

The 1978 constitution drafted and approved, following Franco's death, after the peaceful transition from fascism to bourgeois democracy by the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain, the PSOE and former Francoites, allows the deployment of the Spanish army under article 116. A state of alarm, exception or siege can be put in place "when extraordinary circumstances would make it impossible for the competent authorities using ordinary powers to maintain normality."

It will be under these powers that the Spanish military will be deployed against any strikes and demonstrations that threaten the ruling class. The latest anti-riot training exercises testify to the advanced state of decay of Spanish democracy. The PP government, the PSOE, and the trade unions are deeply discredited due to their attacks on workers' living standards. The Spanish ruling class has nothing to offer except violent crackdowns and mass arrests.

Madrid is not alone. Throughout Europe the ruling class is once again preparing dictatorial forms of rule. In Greece, for example, the New Democracy/PASOK coalition government of Antonis Samaras, on three separate occasions, has placed striking workers under martial law and has repeatedly used police against strikers and has banned demonstrations.

In France, the unpopular Socialist Party government under President François Hollande launched a savage crackdown on protests sparked by the police murder of Rémi Fraisse, a 21-year-old environmental activist. This summer, Hollande banned protests against Israel's brutal assault on Gaza that killed more than 2,000 Palestinians.



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