

Free Spanish rapper Pablo Hasél, jailed on terror charges!

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Spanish rapper Pablo Hasél is set to go to prison for allegedly “glorifying terrorism,” “inciting violence” and “insulting the Spanish crown and state institutions” in tweets and songs. He would become the first musician imprisoned since the end of the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco in 1978 and could face up to two decades in prison.

Hasél, 33, whose real name is Pablo Rivadulla, is a left-wing rapper popular for his political songs and poems against successive Popular Party (PP), Socialist Party (PSOE) and Podemos-backed governments. He criticizes anti-immigrant and pro-austerity policies, warning about the rise of fascism, authoritarianism and police state repression.

The unrelenting pursuit of Hasél and other artists and musicians is part of an escalating campaign by the European ruling class on free speech and democratic rights, intensified with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Terrified at growing social opposition to murderous “herd immunity” policies and bank and corporate bailouts, the ruling class aims to censor artists with draconian prison sentences.

Hasél has been persecuted over a number of years. In 2011, he was arrested for his song “Democracy F* You,” where he called for the liberation of the jailed leader of the Maoist armed group, First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups (GRAPO). In 2014 he was sentenced to two years in prison for publicly insulting the King of Spain and glorifying terrorism. The sentence was not served, however, as Hasél did not have a criminal record.

In March 2017, the prosecutor’s office requested five years against him, to be added to the two he already has, for more songs and 64 Tweets. These tweets include:

- “The police kill 15 migrants and they are saints.

The people defends itself from this brutality and we are ‘violent terrorists’, scum.” Hasél was referring to the infamous Tarajal Massacre, when police fired tear gas and rubber bullets on migrants attempting to swim across to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, causing 15 men to drown.

- “The Bourbon mobster partying with the Saudi monarchy, among those who finance ISIS everything remains.” Hasél was referring to well-known relations between the Saudi and Spanish Bourbon monarchies, and between the House of Saud and Islamist terror group ISIS.

During the trial, Hasél did not condemn his songs and tweets, noting that “half the country thinks the same” about the monarchy. He said he sings about objective facts, widely reported in the media. He said that “in the end I will be the one made to pay” for the monarchy’s action—an observation that former King Juan Carlos seemed to confirm last year, when he fled Spain like a thief to avoid prosecution on corruption charges.

Hasél claimed he saw groups like GRAPO and the Basque separatist armed group ETA as “resistance” organizations. These groups are now defunct, in the case of GRAPO, since the 1980s. Hasél’s songs cannot be seriously presented as support for violent armed actions.

He concluded his defense, saying, “the limits of freedom of expression are always for us. It is the anti-fascists who are tried, persecuted and condemned. For those who want to sentence me to prison, the main problem is that I’m not a fascist, and I don’t want to throw bombs at Catalans, and seek the death of homosexuals and immigrants.”

In November 2020, the higher courts rejected his appeal and approved his conviction. On January 28, he received a judicial order to surrender within 10 days to

face imprisonment. Hasél refused to surrender voluntarily, and his incarceration is imminent this week.

Currently he has been sentenced to a minimum of nine months in jail. But the courts are adding many new accusations that he could end up spending as much as 20 years behind bars.

The incarceration of Hasél is a blatant attack on basic democratic rights, including freedom of expression and artistic liberty. To state this does not imply any political sympathy for the petty-bourgeois Basque nationalists Hasél has defended or their terrorist activities, or his support for Stalinist regimes in the USSR, Eastern Europe and China. However, the Spanish state is clearly setting a precedent for a draconian crackdown on any oppositional political or artistic statement.

Indeed, Hasél himself noted, “you don’t have to agree with everything I say to see that this is a serious attack on freedom of expression.”

Last week hundreds and, in some cases, thousands have attended protests defending Hasél in Girona, Barcelona, Lleida, Manresa, Granada, Valencia, Zaragoza and Madrid. He also received solidarity messages from other singers or rappers, including Cesar Strawberry, ToteKing and Los Chikos del Maiz, and actors like Javier Bardem, Luis Tosar and Willy Toledo.

Spanish singer-songwriter Lluís Llach criticized the decision, comparing it to his songs against the Franco dictatorship in the 1970s. “ They are putting more musicians in prison now than during the Transition. Those of us that stood up against Franco’s regime were not imprisoned back then. Now things have changed.”

Hasél’s prosecution is part of a broad campaign of intimidation after the brutal police crackdown on the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. This was followed by relentless propaganda supporting fascist protests, the fascistic Vox party and show trials of Catalan nationalist politicians.

In November 2017, 12 rappers of the now-defunct band La Insurgencia were sentenced to six months in prison for glorifying terrorism. In 2018, rapper Josep Beltrán (Valtònyc) fled to Belgium in May to avoid a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence after being convicted of glorifying terrorism and insulting the monarchy. In recent years, more artists and citizens have been sentenced for blasphemy and glorifying

terrorism.

A stench of fascism emerges from the state apparatus jailing Hasél. The same courts attacking artists for “glorifying terrorism” sentenced Catalan nationalists to a decade in prison for peaceful protests, claimed Francisco Franco’s 1936 fascist coup was legitimate and declared that his regime did not commit crimes against humanity. Over the past months, sections of the army working with Vox have repeatedly called for a coup. In private WhatsApp chats, former generals proclaim the need to “kill 26 million” left-wing voters.

Predictably, the PSOE-Podemos government, which is responsible for Hasél’s jailing, is downplaying the significance of this attack on fundamental liberties.

Pathetically Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias tweeted his concern for the state’s reputation. He said, “I think that in a democracy nobody should go to jail for crimes of opinion. There are other legal mechanisms to protect honour, integrity or prestige. I think Hasél’s incarceration will create the feeling that the law is not always the same for everyone.”

Similarly, Podemos spokesperson Isabel Serra stated in a press conference that Hasél’s conviction demonstrates “that freedom of expression in this country has been asphyxiated since the gag law was approved, a law that must be repealed urgently.”

In truth, Hasél has been prosecuted using the penal code, specifically by Articles 578 (exaltation of terrorism), 504 (insults to the security forces) and 491 (insults to the Crown), not under the reactionary Citizens Security Law (“gag law”) of the Popular Party (PP). Serra was attempting to deflect criticism of her party’s complicity in the repression of artists towards the right-wing PP.

Hasél has correctly accused Podemos “of being guilty, direct accomplices” in his persecution.



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