

Hundreds of artists denounce Spanish rapper Pablo Hasél's imminent jailing

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is preparing to incarcerate rapper Pablo Hasél over tweets and a song supposedly “glorifying terrorism,” “inciting violence” and “insulting the Spanish crown and state institutions.” He would become the first musician imprisoned in Spain since the end of Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship in 1978. He faces up to two decades in prison.

The deadline for him to report to jail has now elapsed. Hasél, whose real name is Pablo Rivadulla Duro, has refused to turn himself in, saying that he will have to be “kidnapped” by police. He has denounced the PSOE-Podemos government's promises to reform the penal code to halt his imprisonment as empty, instead calling on artists, workers and youth to mobilise independently. He received a widespread response among artists and workers who correctly see his jailing as a fundamental attack on democratic rights and a major step towards dictatorship.

The state's allegations that his calls to release Maoist prisoners support terrorism, or that his criticism of Spain's corrupt monarchy is an insult to Spain, are false and reactionary. While King Juan Carlos has fled Spain for his corrupt business deals with Saudi Arabia, the Spanish state is moving to prosecute Hasél for exercising his artistic liberty. This has provoked mass anger. Recent weeks have seen hundreds of protests in cities across Spain including Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Granada, Sevilla, and Malaga to defend Hasél.

Nearly 300 actors, musicians and artists signed a manifesto titled “Without freedom of expression there is no Democracy.” Signatories include film directors Pedro Almodovar and Fernando Trueba (*Belle Epoque*, *The Artist and the Model*); actors Javier Bardem, Luís Tosar (*The Minions of Midas*, *Adu*), Alba Flores (*La Casa de Papel*), Aitana Sánchez Gijón (*The Machinist*); and musicians Joan Manuel Serrat, Isamel Serrano, Josele Santiago, Coque Malla, Brisa Fenoy, Pedro Guerra or

Fermín Muguruza. The manifesto starkly warns:

“The persecution of rappers, tweeters, journalists, as well as other representatives of culture and art, for exercising their freedom of expression, has been relentless. The Spanish state has come to head the list of countries that have most retaliated against artists ...

“It is evident that with the imprisonment of Pablo Hasel, a sword of Damocles hangs over the heads of any public figure daring to publicly criticize the actions of any state institution.

“This situation must be widely publicized internationally, to highlight where we find ourselves. We are aware that, if we let Pablo go to jail, they can go after any of us tomorrow, until any dissenting voice is silenced.

“That is why the undersigned, as representatives of the world of art and culture in the Spanish state, have come together to show our support for Pablo, demand his freedom, as well as oppose these types of crimes that not only curtail the right of freedom of expression, but also of ideological and artistic freedom.”

Separately, 140 writers and journalists, including Jordi Évole, Rosa María Calaf, Manuel Rivas and Maruja Torres, released a statement in support of Hasél, saying rapping “is not a crime, even if you don't like the lyrics of the person rapping.” Street artists also showed their support for Hasél. Numerous murals have emerged throughout Spain, including in Barcelona.

The outpouring of mass support for Hasél is a political indictment of both the reactionary judiciary machine that condemned him and above all of the PSOE-Podemos government. A class gulf separates the social democrats and petty-bourgeois “left populists” from the working class and more serious layers of artists, who are moving to the left.

It is ever more evident that the ruling elite can impose its rule—including the murderous “herd immunity” policy that has let COVID-19 run rampant across Europe, killing

over 750,000 people—only with fascistic dictatorships and an assault on fundamental democratic rights. The incarceration of artists like Hasél, who has denounced police violence, the murder of migrants, fascism and the Spanish monarchy, is part of this process.

The urgency of the warning in the artists' manifesto is fully justified: there is a rising, international danger of a turn to fascist dictatorship. The US Senate voted Saturday to acquit former President Donald Trump on impeachment charges, even after Trump incited a far-right insurrection on January 6 at the US Capitol, trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election. The ruling elite is preparing coup attempts, repression of left-wing protests, and violent targeting of political opposition.

Events have fully vindicated the International Committee of the Fourth International's warnings that opposition to fascistic and police-state methods can only develop in opposition not only to social democratic parties like the PSOE, but to petty-bourgeois "left populist" parties like Podemos.

It is significant that many of the artists who signed the manifesto defending Hasél previously supported the PSOE or Stalinist forces allied to Podemos. Bardem and Almodovar famously supported the PSOE's election in 2004 as a way of opposing the Iraq War, which the previous right wing Popular Party government had joined. Today, however, artists and workers are increasingly aware that this opposition to fascism and police state methods requires building an independent movement against the PSOE and Podemos.

Nearly two decades after the Iraq war, the PSOE and Podemos are implementing the criminal "herd immunity" policy, bailing out banks and corporations with billions, intensifying internet spying and persecuting migrants. Last year, protests against PSOE-Podemos austerity, "herd immunity" and back-to-work policies were met with police violence and threats to deploy the army.

This naked turn towards fascistic policy has gone hand-in-hand with the official re-legitimisation of fascism. Spanish courts have 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.

Last week, a court freed a former right-wing officer who posted to social media photographs of himself firing a shotgun at pictures of PSOE-Podemos government ministers. The court ruled he had "no other purpose than killing time." It added that he did not act "with a view to intimidate the authorities."

The same court, however, ruled Hasél's tweets and songs are a "potential risk" because one of his 50,000 followers on YouTube could be "emboldened by his words" and "end up using violence."

The PSOE-Podemos government's response has been utterly cynical. In an attempt to calm mounting outrage over Hasél's jailing in the run-up to this weekend's Catalan regional elections, it briefly announced that it was preparing measures to ban prison terms for crimes involving freedom of expression. On Sunday night, however, the Spanish attorney general's office announced that the PSOE-Podemos government supports jailing Hasél. In Barcelona, a mural in support of Hasél was painted over under the direction of Podemos-backed Mayor Ada Colau.

Hasél rightly dismissed the PSOE-Podemos government's promises as lies. His latest song, Ni Felipe VI, with nearly a quarter-million visits, denounced "the misnamed progressive [PSOE-Podemos] government which has perpetuated repression. Feeling nervous as the streets fill up for freedom of expression, they have promised to do something, trying to stop the mobilisation, but only with this will we win this struggle."

For artists and youth seeking to defend Hasél and freedom of expression, the turn is to the working class and the building of a movement in defence of democratic rights and for socialism against the social democrats and their corrupt petty-bourgeois allies like Podemos.



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