

Protests erupt as Spanish Socialist Party-Podemos regime jails rapper Pablo Hasél

Alejandro López
16 February 2021

Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government seized rapper Pablo Hasél yesterday in the city of Lleida in Catalonia to jail him on charges of insulting the Spanish state and the Bourbon monarchy. The first musician imprisoned in Spain since 1978 and the fall of the fascist regime led by Francisco Franco, Hasél faces nine months in prison. He could remain in prison up to two decades, depending on the outcome of other charges against him.

Yesterday morning, over 50 anti-riot police in 20 police vans sent by the Catalan-nationalist regional government, barged into the university where Hasél had barricaded himself with over 50 students, who sprayed fire extinguishers at police during a two-hour confrontation. Ultimately, Hasél was arrested and led away shouting, "They will never silence us; death to the fascist state."

Yesterday evening, protests erupted across Catalonia and in Spain's third-largest city, Valencia. Thousands marched in Barcelona chanting "Free Pablo Hasél," "Here we are, the antifascists," "The Bourbons are thieves." Thousands also marched in Girona and Lleida, where protesters pelted the PSOE offices with eggs. On Twitter, news of Hasél and hash tags such as #SpainIsAFascistState and #TheBourbonsAreThieves became trending topics.

Police savagely cracked down on all the protests. Two young men were severely injured at the protest in Barcelona, shot with foam bullets to the eye and to the head. Police violently dispersed the protest in Valencia, claiming protesters had authorization for a gathering but not to march through the city. Fifteen people were arrested at the protests.

The jailing of Hasél is an outrageous attack on freedom of expression, aiming to silence an artist famous for criticizing Spain's corrupt capitalist regime.

The night before his arrest, Hasél wrote on Twitter: "I'm locked inside the University of Lleida with quite a few supporters, so they'll have to break in if they want to arrest me and put me in prison." He also published several of the 62 tweets "for which I'm going to be jailed in a few minutes or hours. Literally for explaining reality. Tomorrow it could be you."

Besides his having called Spain's former Bourbon monarch King Juan Carlos a "thief" in a song, Hasél is being jailed for such Tweets as:

- "Because of Saudi Arabia the kids in Yemen suffer like this [attached an image of a malnourished Yemeni child on scales]. Things of democrats like the Bourbon mafia."

- "[Basque nationalist] Joseba Arregi was murdered by the police under torture."

- "Two years since the murder of Iñigo Cabacas by police, no one has been charged."

These tweets underscore the fraudulence of the charges against Hasél. Spain's royal family has strong ties to the House of Saud, selling weapons to the Saudi royals for their war in Yemen. King Juan Carlos has also fled to the United Arab Emirates to avoid prosecution on charges of accepting bribes from Saudi Arabia.

In the past weeks, Hasél has enjoyed broad support among workers, youth and artists. Protests were held in cities throughout Spain.

Nearly 300 actors, musicians and artists signed a manifesto titled "Without freedom of expression there is no Democracy." It reads, "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.” It calls for Hasél’s jailing to be “publicized internationally,” adding: “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.”

Signatories include film directors Pedro Almodovar and Fernando Trueba, actors Javier Bardem and Luís Tosar and singer-songwriter Joan Manuel Serrat. Many are direct victims or descendants of victims of the Francoite regime. Others have opposed the fascistic anti-Catalan campaign, clamp down on democratic rights and imperialist wars over the past decades.

Actor Javier Bardem’s uncle, Juan Antonio Bardem, was a director imprisoned by Franco for his anti-fascist films. Joan Manuel Serrat, one of the most important figures of modern, popular music in both the Spanish and Catalan language, repeatedly came into conflict with the Francoist state in the 1970s. He is widely known for singing about workers struggles, against the regime’s executions of political prisoners, and for paying tribute to left-wing poets and singers murdered by the regime.

The PSOE-Podemos government’s jailing of Hasél is a sign of its intense fear of rising social anger among workers and youth. Decades of deep austerity, imperialist war and police-state policies, particularly since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, have discredited the social order in Spain and across Europe. With tens of millions of workers unemployed and opposition rapidly mounting to its “herd immunity” policy on COVID-19, the ruling class fears an eruption of explicit political opposition.

The PSOE-Podemos government has alternated between threatening Hasél with prosecution over vast numbers of his tweets and comments, and suggesting that it might suspend his sentence. Podemos also cynically attempted to posture as a critic of Hasél’s prosecution, submitting a request for a pardon to the Ministry of Justice. They have also called for changing the penal code, something they have not done after two years in power. However, Hasél remained defiant throughout.

On Sunday, the PSOE-Podemos government opted to try to make an example out of Hasél. The attorney general, who is answerable to the PSOE-Podemos government, told the High Court his office did not

oppose Hasél’s incarceration. The following day, the judges said that they had no reason to suspend Hasél’s imprisonment because, in their opinion, the singer “persists in his antisocial attitude.”

Hasél posted a song five days ago, *Ni Felipe VI*, with 340,000 visits now, ironically dedicating it to “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.”

In the song, Hasél mocks the current king, and Podemos general secretary (and deputy prime minister) Pablo Iglesias: “It sickens you [King Felipe VI] that you don’t control the masses. [My tweets] are not insults, but telling the truth. You fascist, we are not the domesticated Iglesias, we are the anger to which the revolution aspires and not lulling it to sleep.”

The PSOE-Podemos government is jailing Hasél in a desperate attempt to silence a figure who has given voice to widely felt anger at the political criminality of Spanish capitalism and the cowardice and treachery of pseudo-left groups like Podemos. The force that can and must be politically mobilized against the police-state machine is the Spanish and international working class. In that struggle, it is essential to demand the freeing of Pablo Hasél.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact