Rapper's arrest triggers mass protests over social conditions in Spain

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Protests continue against the incarceration of rapper Pablo Hasél by the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos. Hasél was jailed for insulting the state and the Bourbon monarchy in tweets and songs.

Anger is only mounting after another rapper, Elgio, received a six-month prison sentence on Tuesday. Like Hasél, his conviction is for a "crime of glorifying terrorism" for praising "in an almost systematic way" the long-defunct armed group GRAPO and its members. The High Court suspended his entry into prison, since the sentence is less than two years but reminded him that this decision is subject to not committing any crime over the next two years.

Hasél was jailed after he violated this condition by continuing to sing and tweet.

Over the past 10 days, tens of thousands of demonstrators have joined protests in cities throughout Spain, including Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao and Madrid. Most have concentrated in Catalonia, Hasél's home region. Over the past four years, protests in the region have been violently repressed as part of the fascistic anti-Catalan campaign by successive Popular Party, PSOE and Podemos governments.

Most of the protesters are between 16 and 25 years old. They are organising through social media and Telegram channels, outside of the control of the official political parties and trade unions. Most are not affiliated with any parties, although members of the Catalan-nationalist Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP) and other pseudo-left parties have attempted to coopt the protests to suppress social opposition to the PSOE-Podemos government.

Hasél himself is a Stalinist of the most repulsive kind, who has repeatedly proclaimed his support for the assassination of Leon Trotsky. Among the protesters there are many who are disgusted by Hasél's tributes to the murderer of the great revolutionary, whose memory is honored among broad sections of the Spanish and Catalan working class. However, the protesters are being animated beyond the Hasél issue and the attack on freedom of expression. This is a generation that has only witnessed austerity, mass unemployment, relentless media propaganda in favour of the fascistic Vox party and attacks on democratic rights, under both the right-wing Popular Party, the PSOE and Podemos.

Youth face terrible social conditions. Over 40 percent of them are currently unemployed. For those with a job, 49 percent face precarious, temporary contracts. As of 2019, a year before the pandemic, the average age most young people left their parents' home was 29.5 years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated an already far advanced breakdown. The PSOE-Podemos government's criminal "herd immunity" policy has left over 100,000 dead, according to the latest National Institute of Statistics data, and over 2.5 million infected. Youth have faced the brunt of this policy, being forced to go back to schools so that profits can be extracted from their parents' labour, work in precarious and unsafe jobs in supermarkets or as waiters and delivery staff, and take exams in person in universities.

On top of this, they are targeted and blamed each time the incidence rate of the virus hikes due to the criminal policies of the ruling class. The population is bombarded with the idea that illegal youth parties and poor mask usage are to blame for the spread of the virus, not the reopening of schools, job places and overcrowded public transport.

Alex Cantón from Valencia, 24, working as a food delivery rider for Just Eat, told *El País*, "There's a lot of rage and an accumulation of injustices and problems that youth are facing that have spread to the rest of society. We cannot enter the labour market or we have

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very precarious jobs, although I don't think that this is an easy thing to do for a 50 year old either."

Laura said, "We came to the protest, but Hasél is just another excuse." She said, "We are protesting against evictions, in defense of people without protection, for the years of repression that we have had to endure. The jailing [of Hasél] was just the straw that broke the camel's back."

Anthony Corey, a 23-year-old history student born in Honduras, said, "There are jailed political prisoners, activists, rappers. ... On the other hand, nobody says anything about the ex-military men who said in a WhatsApp chat that they want to shoot millions of people or the barbarities that journalists like Federico Jiménez Losantos say every day," in reference to the right-wing pundit and radio host.

El País had to acknowledge the vast hostility it faced from protesters. It noted, "In Barcelona, many protesters decline to speak to *El País* ." It blames the influence of the Catalan nationalists, claiming that hostility towards the media has "penetrated deep down, which, protest after protest, reflecting a proclamation that is repeated: … 'Manipulative Spanish press.' Of those who speak, almost none give their surname. All justify this search for anonymity by citing the 'fear' that the Mossos [regional police] could identify them with the riots."

The fact that many protesters view *El País* as a conduit of the Spanish state and refuse to provide their surnames, fearing they will be handed over to the police, says volumes about the journal. Many protesters view *El País*, not as a guarantor of freedom of expression, but one of its chief attackers on behalf of the PSOE-Podemos government.

Carme, 20-year-old philosophy student, told *El Periódico*, "I don't care about Pablo Hasél. He has said many things that I don't like, but that's not why he has to go to prison. I come out more for criticizing the abuses of the police and how young people are criminalized for protesting than for Hasél."

Another protester, Marc, 23, said, "We want things to change. Those in power smell like Francoism," referring to the fascist regime set up by General Francisco Franco at the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 and that fell only in 1978.

Joan, 21 years old, said, "We are protesting Hasél's imprisonment because it's unjust and because we young people suffer unemployment. We are already seeing what our future will look like."

Reis, 25, told Reuters, "I am not here only for [Hasél], but for the right to express ourselves, and because there is a lot of discontent for a lot of things that must change."

Students and young workers must assimilate the lessons of the past. It is now 10 years since mass youth protests erupted throughout Spain after the Egyptian Revolution in January 2011 over hardship, savage austerity measures and the PSOE-led government.

The so-called *indignados movement*, or 15-M movement, was characterised by a rejection of all major parties, the PSOE, above all, which has implemented cuts amid unemployment levels reaching 50 percent among 18 to 25 year olds. There was also enormous anger against the trade unions like the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the social democratic General Union of Labor (UGT) that have been the main vehicles in imposing these measures.

Pseudo-left groups like Anticapitalistas promoted diffuse assemblies and opposed calls to build a new political leadership, instead promoting "autonomy," "democratic self-organisation" and "no-politics"—blocking any genuine debate and political challenge to the PSOE and the union bureaucracy.

Having suppressed the social opposition, Anticapitalistas along with a group of Stalinist professors and spokespersons for this movement then founded the Podemos party three years later. The party is now showering corporations and banks with billions of euros, implementing austerity, and clamping down on democratic rights, including the jailing of musicians.

The critical question today is the intersection of the radicalization of the youth, expressed in these protests with a worked-out perspective for opposing the drive by the ruling class to police-state rule. This underscores the urgency of building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, based on the Trotskyist strategy of permanent revoution, in Spain.

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