

Spanish media, politicians denounce youth protesting rapper Hasél's jailing

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As protests continue in Catalonia and throughout Spain against the incarceration of rapper Pablo Hasél, the Spanish media and the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government have launched a frenzied campaign to slander protesting youth as "terrorists" and "criminals." Hasél was jailed in February for nine months on bogus charges of insulting the monarchy and "inciting terrorism" in his tweets and songs.

Last week, the Spanish National Police began investigating whether "terrorist" planning or organising had been behind demonstrations against Hasél's imprisonment, according to online news site *El Confidencial*. Police are analysing the internal structures of groups involved in coordinating the protests to examine if their division of responsibilities, methodology and leadership bodies resemble those of terrorist organisations, *El Confidencial* stated.

Tens of thousands of demonstrators, mostly aged between 16 and 25 years old, have joined protests opposing these anti-democratic attacks on freedom of speech in cities including Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao and Madrid. The demonstrations have taken place outside the control of the main political parties and trade unions, with protesters organising through social media and Telegram channels.

The demonstrators have faced unrelenting police brutality, with over 200 people injured at the hands of security forces. A 19-year-old woman lost an eye after being struck by a foam bullet fired by the Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan police). Protesters have responded by throwing bottles and stones at police, with some isolated incidents of buildings or vehicles being vandalised or burnt. At least 137 people have been arrested in Catalonia alone, with more detained elsewhere.

At the start of March, the PSOE-Podemos government's Public Prosecutor's Office demanded an additional five years and three months of imprisonment

for Hasél, sparking further protests. The new indictment relates to Hasél's participation in a 2018 protest against the arrest of deposed Catalan President Carles Puigdemont in Germany. The Public Prosecutor's Office claims Hasél and 10 co-defendants tried to break into a government building in the Catalan city of Lleida.

Spain is a social powder keg, with opposition mounting to mass unemployment, poverty, the PSOE-Podemos government's move to authoritarian rule and its "herd immunity" policy on the pandemic. Terrified that the protests will keep spreading, the entire ruling class is relentlessly demonising protesting youth and demanding a further brutal crackdown.

At the end of February, Pedro J. Ramírez, the director of right-wing online newspaper *El Español*, appeared on TV channel La Sexta to denounce the "revolutionary" situation in Catalonia, claiming that protesters were launching "attacks in which they use the techniques of urban guerrillas."

Protesters come from a "radicalised minority in the orbit of Puigdemont" and are "of a xenophobic character and are the inheritors of the old Catalan fascism," Ramírez claimed. "The majority are from the extreme anti-system left."

The Catalan nationalist parties echoed these hysterical denunciations. Miquel Sàmper, Minister of the Interior in the Catalan regional government for Puigdemont's Together for Catalonia (JxCat) party declared that groups linked to "combative communism," "very violent anarchism" and a "large number of common criminals" were leading the protests.

The media and the main parties have also whipped up a frenzy over an incident in which eight protesting youths set fire to a police van in which two officers happened to still be inside. The officers quickly escaped the van and were unhurt. The protesters have been imprisoned pending trial on charges of "attempted murder," attacking

officers, public disorder, criminal damage, illegal protesting and belonging to a criminal group.

Sàmper responded with a tirade against the “pure, uninhibited and unprecedented violence” of protests in Catalonia. Ada Colau, mayor of Barcelona and a leader of Barcelona en Comú—a coalition including Podemos and the Initiative for Catalonia-Greens (ICV)—also declared her “most absolute rejection, most firm and resounding condemnation of the acts of violence.”

The PSOE’s Salvador Illa, who gained the most votes in the recent Catalan elections, took the opportunity to rant that “whoever does not explicitly condemn the violence and does not support the Mossos d’Esquadra and the security forces and bodies is unfit to govern.”

The Supreme Court has reportedly opened an investigation into Podemos parliamentary spokesperson Pablo Echenique for supposedly inciting violence in a mildly worded tweet in support of the demonstrations. On 17 February, Echenique had tweeted: “All my support to the young anti-fascists who are demanding justice and freedom of speech in the streets.... The violent mutilation of the protester’s eye [by a police foam bullet] must be investigated and those responsible must be decisively held to account.”

The investigation into Echenique came at the instigation of the far-right Vox party, who lodged a complaint against the Podemos spokesperson, claiming that he was supporting “terrorist acts.” Two police unions, the Spanish Confederation of Police (CEP) and the Unified Police Union (SUP), also filed complaints against Echenique. Another police society, JUPOL (Police Justice), declared that Echenique had “encouraged street terrorism.”

This hysterical campaign comes only a week after Ignacio Garriga, president of Vox’s parliamentary group in Catalonia, demanded in a press conference that the “anti-fascist movement must be declared a terrorist organisation.”

This call for the effective illegalisation of anti-fascist protests comes directly out of the playbook of US ex-president Donald Trump, who threatened to declare Antifa a terrorist organisation in 2019. Trump ramped up his campaign to brand domestic opposition as terrorism after mass protests against police brutality shook the United States last year, in response to the police killing of George Floyd.

As with Trump’s targeting of “Antifa”—a loose network of anti-fascist individuals, not a clearly defined organisation—Vox’s demands to designate the broad “anti-

fascist movement” as “terrorist” would criminalise many thousands of left-wing individuals who participate in protests against police violence, attacks on democratic rights and austerity, regardless of their views or actions.

Trump subsequently launched a failed coup attempt aiming to overturn the US presidential elections on January 6, 2021. The fact that the Democratic Party and the Biden administration have covered for this coup attempt and sought to hide its implications from the public has simply encouraged far-right political forces across Europe, including in Spain, to more aggressively press attacks on democratic rights.

Garriga insisted that political groups supporting “violence” in Catalonia “should be subjected to the current law of parties.” This law, passed in 2002 with votes from the PSOE, People’s Party (PP) and numerous regional Catalan, Andalusian and Canary Islander parties, provided for the illegalisation of political groups supportive of the Basque-separatist ETA, considered a terrorist group in Spain.

At the press conference, Garriga denounced youth and workers in Catalonia protesting Hasél’s jailing, claiming that “organized bands of terrorists” had carried out violent attacks in Catalonia.

Garriga falsely denounced the Catalan government and the media for supporting the protests, declaring that “Catalan institutions, motivated by separatism, are transferring absolute impunity to those committing violence, who are attacking shops and causing destruction in the streets.” The media is hiding the real ideology of those “responsible for the altercations by street terrorists,” he continued, “who are separatists and from the far-left.”

This fascistic campaign cannot be opposed by appealing to the PSOE-Podemos government, which has tacitly supported the jailing of Hasél and the brutal repression of protestors. The defence of democratic rights and the fight against fascism is by necessity a struggle for socialism. This requires a decisive political break with the pseudo-left Podemos party and its satellites and the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Spain and internationally.



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