

Mass protests erupt in Spain over official inaction on deadly Valencia floods

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10 November 2024

On November 9, a large demonstration filled the streets of Valencia, as anger erupts against regional and national officials who failed to act to protect against the floods that devastated the Valencian region and other areas of Spain. The floods caused 223 deaths and left entire towns devastated.

According to state authorities, more than 130,000 people participated in the march. It was reportedly the largest protest march in Valencia's history, mobilizing a large portion of the Valencia metropolitan area's 2.5 million inhabitants.

The number of protesters was so large that when the head of the march reached the end of the route, there were still thousands of protesters at the starting point, the town hall square. Crowds filled streets adjacent to the path of the protest as they were unable to reach the route itself, which was completely packed. Thousands more people demonstrated in other cities in the Valencia region such as Alicante, Elche and Castellón.

The marches called for the resignation of the Valencian regional president Carlos Mazón, a member of the right-wing Partido Popular (PP), and also criticised the national PSOE-Sumar government and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

During the march there were shouts of "Murderers, murderers," "Mazón, resign," and "Only the people save the people." There were also signs that read "Mazón, your people repudiate you, neither forget nor forgive," "We are stained with mud, you are stained with blood," and "Neither Mazón, nor Madrid nor Bourbons." This slogan refers to another leader of the Spanish capitalist establishment, Spanish King Felipe de Borbón.

Before the demonstration began, the organisers declared, "They have shown themselves to be incompetent. They do not deserve to lead the lives of

the Valencians. They have not known how to manage a natural catastrophe, they have not known how to warn us in time, they do not know how to organise us with the help of the clean-up and the collection of material and, of course, they will not be able to organise the reconstruction."

A WSWs correspondent who participated in the march noted a heavy police presence along the march. They arrived in muddy uniforms, which was taken by protesters as a false attempt to show that they were working on cleanup and rescue efforts. At one point, a police officer began laughing at protesters' chants against Mazón, to which a protester replied by telling him: "Don't laugh, there were deaths."

After these provocations, the riot police finally charged to remove protesters who remained in the town hall square. Protesters replied by shouting, "I would be ashamed to be a police officer" and "You are defending a murderer."

Anger at this colossal social crime and at the actions of the various Spanish leaders had already erupted a week earlier when Mazón, Pedro Sánchez and the king tried to visit Paiporta, one of the towns most affected by the floods. These three parasites expected to be welcomed as the saviours of the people. But hundreds of people who were trying to clean the streets and help the victims of the flood turned angrily against them, shouting "murderers" and throwing mud at them.

On the day of the tragedy, despite the warnings of serious flooding that had been issued for several days by the AEMET (Spanish Meteorological Association) which that same day at 7 a.m. warned of extreme danger, Mazón took no action. He participated in various events, including an official meal, until 6 p.m. By the time he joined the meeting of the emergency services and authorized the first alarm to the population

after 8 p.m., many people had already drowned.

Sánchez's national government also failed to act until several days had passed, using the excuse that it did not want to interfere with the regional government's powers. In reality, it could have taken measures from the outset that would have saved lives. Protest organizers issued a statement noting that the Sánchez government "should have immediately put strong pressure on the Valencian government to deploy all available personnel and help the citizens rebuild their lives."

For her part, Sumar leader and Minister of Labor Yolanda Díaz did not at any time propose sending workers home and prohibiting non-essential activities. This meant that many workers were trapped at their jobs or in their vehicles trying to get home. A day later, Díaz made a pathetic call, appealing to the "responsibility of all companies" and asking that they not require their employees to go to their jobs in the areas affected by the storm.

What is palpable in the reaction to this catastrophe is the criminal nature of the capitalist political establishment. Though it had been known for decades that authorities needed to carry out a whole series of works for flood control purposes, neither the PP nor the PSOE, nor the PSOE's allies Podemos and Sumar, took any action either at the regional or national levels. In fact, no such works have been carried out in the Valencia region for 15 years.

Since 2007, there has been a flood risk management plan for the Poyo and Pozalet ravines that was never put into action. If it had been, would have saved dozens of lives. This plan was valued at €250 million (about €378 million currently with inflation).

While this is a substantial sum, it pales in comparison with the PSOE-Podemos government's historic increase in military spending to €27 billion; with the purchase of €1 billion in weapons from Israel since the start of the Gaza genocide by the current PSOE-Sumar government; or the tens of billions of euros in public bailout funds that the PSOE-Podemos government handed over to large banks and corporations after the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The resignation of some capitalist politicians or moral appeals to others to do something will not prevent catastrophes like the one in Valencia from happening again. These can only be avoided by replacing a

criminal system like capitalism, which puts preparation for war and the interests of millionaires above all else, with socialism—taking control of the means of production out of the hands of the capitalists and, under the democratic control of working people, using them to meet fundamental social needs.



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