

Hundreds of thousands march in nationwide protests for right to decent housing in Spain

Santiago Guillen**15 April 2025**

On April 5, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in more than 40 Spanish cities under the slogan “Let’s end the housing business” to demand the right to decent and affordable housing. The mobilisation was massive. It was the first major nationwide mobilisation since over 100,000 people marched in Madrid in October and a similar number in Barcelona in November.

The housing protests in Spain came the same day as millions marched against Trump in cities across the United States, and amid rising protests and calls for strike action across Europe, from British teachers to French rail workers.

Over 150,000 demonstrators in Madrid marched from Atocha through Gran Vía, calling for an end to “the impunity of landlords” and for a “rent strike.” Over 100,000 marched in Barcelona, reaching Plaza de España in columns from across the city, eventually filling Avenida María Cristina with chants echoing the same calls to end the commodification of housing.

In Málaga, 30,000 demonstrators marched from Plaza de la Marina through working-class neighbourhoods like El Perchel, El Bulto, and Huelín, chanting “the city is not for sale, it is to be defended.” Tens of thousands took to the streets in Valencia with slogans such as “we want neighbours, not landlords” and “they call speculation a solution.” In Galicia, large marches took place in Vigo and Coruña, demanding “real and immediate” measures to curb housing speculation once and for all.

In Granada, thousands marched from Plaza del Triunfo behind a banner reading: “Their business or our homes. Shoulder to shoulder, class against class.” Along the route, which ended at the Fuente de las Batallas, they chanted slogans like “Evicting a family is shameful,” “Every home, a trench,” and “Military spending for education, healthcare, and social housing.”

Tens of thousands more filled the streets in cities such as Palma de Gran Canaria, Mallorca, and Santander. Alongside housing slogans, there were widespread flags and messages in support of the Palestinian people.

These demonstrations were organised by tenant unions, a

grassroots organisations of renters fighting to prevent rent hikes and evictions. These organizations heark back to the example of rent strikes during Spain’s Second Republic, particularly the one on 7 May 1931, when residents of Barcelona’s “Casas Baratas,” home to hundreds of working-class families, refused to pay exploitative rents. By August, over 100,000 tenants had joined the strike.

In 2009, a year after the Wall Street crash, evictions due to unpaid mortgages became widespread. In response, the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) was founded in Barcelona. The PAH became well known and succeeded in halting some evictions. However, it did not obtain its core demands, and instead became a new source of recruits for middle class, pseudo-left parties that aspired to be parties of capitalist government.

One of its leading figures, Ada Colau, became affiliated to the Podemos party, eventually becoming mayor of Barcelona from 2015 to 2023. Many other PAH leaders joined Podemos and later Sumar, gaining seats in regional and national parliaments, effectively demobilising the movement.

In 2017, when the crisis had shifted from mortgages to rental prices, the Sindicat de Llogateres (Tenants’ Union) was founded in Barcelona to fight for affordable rents. It now has 4,000 members and has spread across Spain, organising primarily workers demanding lower rents and advocating rent strikes.

The tenant unions attempt to fill the vacuum left by traditional trade unions, whose bureaucracies have allowed wage increases below inflation and have not mobilised to defend workers’ right to housing. They also give expression to the deep-rooted and widespread, left-wing social opposition in the working class to the policies of Podemos and Sumar.

Podemos and Sumar have been governing partners of the Socialist Party (PSOE) for the past five years—first Podemos until 2023, and then Sumar. They supported record increases in military spending while public services declined. They did nothing to establish housing as a right rather than a

commodity for speculation.

Carme Arcarazo, spokesperson for the Barcelona Tenants' Union, summed it up: "What we've seen these past months is that the government has done very little... Their announcements include a 100 percent tax break for landlords and promises of a future public housing stock—which no one knows if or when it will materialise. They also watered down one of our key proposals: banning speculative purchases, reducing it to just increasing taxes for non-EU buyers."

Protesters stressed the human cost of Spain's housing crisis. A postal worker in Madrid explained he pays €600 in rent on a salary of less than €1,300. A young woman said her income means she will never be able to leave her parents' home, while another university graduate admitted she couldn't even consider living alone due to rent prices.

In Barcelona, Florina, a resident from Vallcarca, spoke at the protest's closing rally, explaining she had been evicted for failing to pay rent and now lives in a shack on municipal land. The city council—governed by the PSOE—now threatens to evict her and others to redevelop the land.

Organisers expressed similar sentiments. The Barcelona Tenants' Union declared: "Faced with governments offering lukewarm measures that serve landlords' interests, society has risen to say that housing involves a clash of interests—and as long as it remains a business enriching a few, it will never be a right for the majority."

In Seville, Álvaro Pastor of the Sindicato por la Vivienda stated that given current rent levels, people have no access to "something as essential as a roof over their head, especially in a city where one can die on the street from heat in summer or cold in winter."

In Mallorca, Bel Abrams of the PAH said cases involving rental issues are increasing: "People are affected by contract terminations, unaffordable rent, or simply unable to find housing, leading to overcrowded homes."

Housing access has only worsened in recent years. Home purchase prices rose by 47 percent between 2015 and 2023, by 8 percent in 2024, and are projected to rise 5–7 percent in 2025. This far outpaces wage growth, with average wage hikes last year just around 2.8 percent, well below inflation.

The rental situation is worse, with a 10-year increase of 85 percent--especially in major cities and tourist zones. In Madrid, rents rose 18.6 percent in 2024, and in Barcelona, 10.9 percent.

These trends are not due to a housing shortage, as bourgeois economists often claim. Over one million housing units in Spain (1,046,188) are owned by large landlords. A total of 27,000 landlords each own more than 10 residential properties, and just 10 of them own more than 200,000 combined—8.9 percent of available homes. In Madrid alone,

the number of large landlords rose by 2,600 in one year; individuals owning more than three rental properties increased from 7,600 to 10,242.

While a few reap huge profits from housing, masses of people are pushed deeper into poverty. The poorest 20 percent of families spend over 70 percent of their income on rent. This reflects Spain's soaring inequality: the richest 1 percent hold 25 percent of all wealth, and the top 10 percent hold 60 percent. In 2002, those figures were 13.8 percent and 43.9 percent, respectively. Increasingly, this wealth is used to buy up housing for speculative purposes.

With tourism a key economic sector in Spain, ten percent of rental housing is now used for tourism, significantly reducing long-term housing availability.

The housing protest is part of a growing international wave of social protests and strike actions against the capitalist oligarchy that reflects growing anger among broad layers of workers at the intractable economic and social crisis of capitalism. Workers are determined to defend key social and democratic rights, such as the right to housing. However, this movement as yet lacks a clear orientation to building a continuing movement in the working class and uniting with workers in struggle in other countries.

It is critical to build rank-and-file organizations not only in working class neighborhoods, but also in workplaces, and to arm them with a socialist perspective in opposition to middle class pseudo-left parties of capitalist government like Podemos and Sumar. The way forward to end the rule of the capitalist oligarchy is a struggle of the international working class for its expropriation in a socialist revolution.

Fighting for this perspective requires building a Trotskyist vanguard in the working class, based on the perspectives of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in opposition to pseudo-left forces like Podemos, Sumar, and their satellites and allies in the union bureaucracies.



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