The eviction of Maricarmen in Spain and the global housing crisis

Santiago Guillen, Alex Lantier
28 September 2026

On September 23, police in Madrid evicted 87-year-old María del Carmen Abascal, known as Maricarmen, from her flat in the city's Retiro district where she had lived since 1956. Riot police cleared hundreds of supporters from the building, and medics carried her out on a stretcher while the crowd chanted, "You are not alone!"

The company that owns her flat had demanded more than three times her old rent. Her eviction has set off protests across Spain. Millions of working people around the world face the same threat: rents they cannot pay, and landlords who have the courts and the police on their side.

Maricarmen paid her rent. She lost her home because of the lease her father signed in 1956 under Spain's old system of rent control. Under a 1994 law, a child who inherits such a lease can keep it for only two years unless she has a disability of 65 percent or more, and Maricarmen's disability is rated at 50 percent. The family that owned the building sold it in 2018, and in March 2020 Urbagestión, the flat's new owner, sued to end her tenancy.

A Madrid court ruled in her favor in January 2022. The provincial appeals court reversed that decision in June 2022, and in December 2023 the Supreme Court refused to hear her appeal. Urbagestión demanded €2,650 a month, later €1,650, from a woman whose pension is about €1,450. It refused an offer from an anonymous donor to cover the difference.

In June a United Nations committee asked Spain to suspend the eviction while it examined her case or else to provide her adequate alternative housing. The court ignored it.

From her hospital bed, Maricarmen issued a defiant video. "I did not manage to defend my home, but I did fight so that others would learn to fight for theirs," she said. Calling on those listening to "please fight," she added, "What I want is that this problem that we have with all the vulture funds be done away with once and for all."

In response, on September 26, tens of thousands marched in Madrid under the slogan "Not one more Maricarmen," with protests in Barcelona, Seville, Valencia, Málaga and other cities. Tenants then set up camp in the Puerta del Sol, the square occupied in 2011 by the mass movement against austerity. The protests follow two years of demonstrations by hundreds of thousands across Spain against soaring rents.

The Madrid Tenants' Union, which called the march, estimated the crowd at 300,000, while the central government's delegation in Madrid claimed only 25,000. Protests were called in 40 cities that day, after rallies in 16 cities earlier in the week. By Sunday evening close to 200 tents stood in the Puerta del Sol, in a camp that was mostly young and included many people with no previous political experience, the newspaper *Público* reported Sunday. On Monday demonstrators blocked the Diagonal, one of Barcelona's main avenues.

The same day, Urbagestión agreed to let Maricarmen return to her flat, after more than four hours of talks mediated by Madrid's municipal housing company. She would sign an eight-year lease with the rent capped at 30 percent of her income, though she must still approve the deal from her hospital bed. The company gave way after five days of protests. The Madrid Tenants' Union kept its camp in the Puerta del Sol, and its spokeswoman Carolina Vilariño said, "This goes beyond Maricarmen."

The response is an indication of the enormous social tensions building up in Spain and beyond. Over the past decade, rents on new leases in Spain have risen faster than wages. Social rental housing accounts for less than 2 percent of Spain's housing stock, compared with an EU average of about 8 percent. According to the national statistics office, 44.3 percent of Spaniards aged 26 to 34 lived with their parents in 2025. Some 272,000 evictions have been carried out since Pedro Sánchez became prime minister in June 2018 or roughly 90 every day.

House prices across the European Union rose by more than 60 percent between 2010 and 2025. In Portugal, where prices rose 16.5 percent in the year to June, protesters marched in 16 cities in March after the government approved measures to speed up evictions. In Ireland, child homelessness has risen sevenfold since 2014.

French police carried out a record 24,556 evictions in 2024, a year in which 912 homeless people died. In England, more than 177,000 children are living in temporary accommodation, also a record.

In the United States, 22.7 million renter households, a record and nearly half of all renters, spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing in 2024. More than 12 million spent over half. The government's count found more than 745,000 people homeless in January 2025. In Ontario, Canada, landlords' applications to evict tenants so that they or their relatives could move in rose 85 percent between 2020 and 2023.

The US private equity firm Blackstone began buying Spanish flats in 2013 and by 2019 was the country's largest private landlord. Banks such as JP Morgan, Bank of America and Deutsche Bank supplied 80 percent of the money at about 3 percent interest, while drawing their own funds from the European Central Bank and the Federal Reserve at zero, the news site Infobae reported in May. A government study found that in 2023 only about 39 percent of Spain's rented homes belonged to individual landlords who rent out a single home.

For the funds, security of tenancy is simply a cost to be eliminated. Maricarmen's case follows the pattern: A rent-controlled flat passes into corporate hands, and the new owner uses the courts and the police to remove a tenant paying below-market rent.

The housing crisis cannot be separated from war and austerity. Governments around the world spent a record $2.9 trillion on their militaries in 2025, "the 11th year of consecutive rises," the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported in April. In Central and Western Europe, spending grew faster than in any year since the end of the Cold War. Spain's rose 50 percent in one year, to $40.2 billion, in a country where social rental housing makes up less than 2 percent of the stock.

US President Donald Trump has asked Congress for $1.5 trillion for the military in the fiscal year that begins October 1, a 42 percent increase. The White House boasted in April that the sum "exceeds even the Reagan buildup by approaching the historic increases just prior to World War II." The same budget would cut non-defense spending by $73 billion.

Governments are borrowing to pay for rearmament, and interest rates are rising. On September 16 the Federal Reserve raised interest rates, its first increase since 2023. On September 24 the mortgage-finance company Freddie Mac put the average 30-year mortgage rate in the United States at 7.03 percent, and tenants will pay for that in higher rents.

In Germany in March 2025, the Social Democrats joined the conservatives to lift the constitutional limit on borrowing for military spending above 1 percent of GDP, and the Greens supplied the votes they needed for a two-thirds majority.

Josh Turek, the Democratic Senate nominee in Iowa, has promised to "ban Wall Street private equity firms from purchasing single family homes," but Democrats in Congress have voted for the Pentagon budget year after year. In Spain, it was the coalition government of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and Sumar that pushed military spending above 2 percent of GDP for the first time since 1994, according to SIPRI.

The PSOE and its pseudo-left partners, including Podemos, will not resolve the housing crisis, because they defend the capitalist property relations from which it arises. Podemos, which emerged from the 2011 protests, entered government with the PSOE in 2020, and its offshoot Sumar remains there today. These governments have bailed out corporations and banks and backed NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, while evictions averaged more than 80 a day. Their record has been so hostile to workers that the coalition may lose next year's elections to an alliance of the right-wing Popular Party and the far-right Vox.

The mass response to Maricarmen's eviction expresses deep opposition in the working class to this entire political setup. "Either the rentier system or the government will fall," renters' union spokeswoman Valeria Racu declared on television. Yet the union's central demand is that the same government that presided over the crisis issue a more ambitious housing decree.

The lessons of the 2011 protests in Spain must be learned. The occupation of the Puerta del Sol that year expressed mass opposition to the austerity of the PSOE government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Its problem was not a lack of militancy. The forces that dominated it proclaimed the movement "non-political" and "leaderless," leaving the field to those who channeled the opposition into Podemos and, ultimately, into government.

The same questions are posed today, in Spain and internationally. Housing cannot be guaranteed as long as it remains a source of profit for Blackstone and its counterparts. Decent housing for all requires placing the real estate funds and the banks under public ownership and democratic control, and turning the resources now spent on war to social needs.

Workers cannot wage that struggle through appeals to the PSOE, Sumar or Podemos. American workers can no more rely on the Democrats than on Trump. The struggle requires the independent organization of the working class, in rank-and-file committees in workplaces and neighborhoods, linked across borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Above all, it requires building a Marxist-internationalist, that is, Trotskyist leadership—the International Committee of the Fourth International—in Spain and around the world.