

“The struggle has to come from below”

Protesters occupying Madrid’s Plaza del Sol speak out, calling for a general strike

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On October 3, millions of people protested in cities across Spain against the eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen and for the right to housing and the need to organize a general strike. Coming amid public sector strikes in Portugal, protests against conscription in Germany, and mass high school student protests in Belgium and France, it revealed the rapid radicalization of workers and youth across Europe. A social order based on inequality and decades of policies of austerity and imperialist war faces deep, politically explosive opposition.

Protesters occupied the Plaza del Sol in Madrid, as well as public squares in a number of other Spanish cities, including Valencia, Barcelona, Seville and Santiago de Compostela. WSWs reporters went to the Plaza del Sol in Madrid to interview workers, professionals and youth who were occupying the square.

A young unemployed worker told the WSWs that the eviction of Maricarmen, followed by her death several days later in hospital, had provoked outrage against capitalist institutions. “An elderly person who has lived for decades in the same house can end up on the street because a company wants higher profits,” she said, drawing the parallel with the situation facing youth: “They tell us that we have to get training to find a good job. But then the money that we earn is not enough to live or to find decent housing. ... We cannot spend out lives working just to pay the rent.”

She stressed her opposition to the entire Spanish political establishment, not only the right but also the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Sumar parties, which claim to be “progressive” but implement anti-worker policies: “The parties that have governed do not offer any

solutions. The PSOE, Podemos and Sumar have participated in the government for years, but they have not changed anything. We are continuing as before.”

She added that she supported calls that have circulated widely among protesters for a general strike, and that “we will not get where we want to go just by protesting for one day.” The ability of the working class to withhold the production of goods and services is, she said, “a source of pressure that cannot be replaced by appeals to the goodwill of the governing parties.”

She said that the strike should be organized by independent assemblies of workers and set into motion a broader confrontation with the capitalist regime: “We must organize ourselves to win this strike, but afterwards we cannot stop.”

A 20-year-old university student who was participating in the Plaza del Sol occupation told the WSWs he was able to study in Madrid only because he did not have to pay rent: “My grandmother had to go into a retirement home, and her house was empty. If it had not been, I would not have been able to afford a place.” He added that his childhood had been shaped by recurring legal battles as landlords tried to evict his relatives and repossess the house.

“In the 2008 crisis, my parents separated, both lost their jobs and people put an embargo on our house,” he said, including an expulsion order when he was a small child. Legal battles continued for decades. He added, “Just recently we received a notification, but the ruling still is not out, everything is rather paralyzed. For the time being that is good, but the problem is that we do not know what will happen.” He said he feared for his “mother, who would not have a place to go.”

He said he supported a general strike and stressed his distrust of the PSOE, Podemos and their affiliated unions, the General Union of Labor (UGT) and the Workers Commissions (CCOO): “I don’t think we can trust the leaderships of the majority unions or the political parties that claim to be more to the left to organize a strike. I believe that the task of mobilizing the people falls to ourselves. And, in fact, that is what we are trying to do from this occupation point.”

He said that the protesters at the Plaza del Sol are trying to set up “nodes” in different districts and neighborhoods of Madrid, that is, “groups of neighbors in a zone who are trying to bring the strike into the neighborhoods.”

Finally, the WSWS spoke to a 36-year-old doctor who had joined the Plaza del Sol encampment’s medical team and said she was “rather struck” by the organization of the camp. She stressed the vast difficulties working people in Spain face for housing: “The vast majority of my friends—those not in a privileged position of being a family that already had higher income or higher qualifications, engineers, doctors, where both people in the couple have good jobs—for them it is impossible to get a home even with two people working.”

“I wonder where all this will end up in the next ten years,” she said, speaking about the continuing rise of rental costs: “This is something that our parents and grandparents had not seen before.”

She explained, “I am a doctor ... Until last year, I was working with a good salary in Andalucia. But because I was unemployed, even though my partner has a full-time job, they considered us a risk, and it cost us blood, sweat and tears to find a place to rent.” She added, “The pressure and the difficulties we have to find housing—and I am not talking about buying it, because we are only in a position to rent—it is brutal.”

She explained that she supported a general strike against the government. “It is difficult for a person or institution with privileges to give them up without any pressure and simply out of goodwill. We know that this goodwill, in fact, does not exist, precisely because if it did, we would have already seen it.” She added, “If we, as the working class, have work as our power, ultimately stopping working is what gives us that power ... I think really the only tool we have today, given how the state power is organized, at least in this

country, is that.”

Stressing that “The struggle has to come from below,” she indicated her distrust of the leaderships of the trade unions: “I think the fact that the heads or the large confederations of the trade unions have posts that are closely tied to management ... prevents them from having an overall vision of the problems and perspectives that come from below.”

When WSWS reporters raised with her the perspective of building committees of action to prepare a general strike in Spain as well as in France and internationally, she replied: “It would be wonderful if there could be international cooperation.”



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