

Eyewitness report: Mass youth protests in Spain

Since 15 May, central squares in towns and cities across Spain have been occupied. In the run up to the local and municipal elections which took place on 22 May, the mainly young protesters demanded real democracy and an end to the alternation between the two parties of big business. At the heart of the protests is Spain's 45% youth unemployment rate and the government's attempts to make young and working class people pay for the massive economic crisis in Spain. Here SARAH WRACK reports from the protests in Madrid.

When I left Madrid on the day of the elections, the protest camp in Puerta del Sol was continuing to grow with new people arriving all the time having travelled from the towns surrounding Madrid and further. Everyone I spoke to in the square was very clear – they're not going anywhere.

General assemblies during the day are attended by at least 2,000 people and in the evenings, more than 30,000 pack into the square. A movement that started with young people has gathered support from the majority. Thousands of families, pensioners and workers pack into the square to join the evening protests. Donations of money, food and blankets keep pouring in.

When I asked why they were there, most people responded "to defend our rights". The government ruled that the camp is illegal which made the protesters even more determined to stay. But they also talked about having no alternative but to protest. They call themselves the 'ni ni' generation because they have "ni empleo, ni casa" (no job, no house).

Alejandro, a university student, told me: "I still live with my parents. I'm only 19 but my brother is 27 and he still lives there too. We don't want

to live in these conditions for our whole lives!"

There is a lot of hostility towards trade unions because of the role of the union leaders in holding back the struggle. There is also big mistrust of political parties.

"We are protesting to defend our right to struggle, for justice, for politicians that represent us more, to say that we didn't cause the crisis, we are its victims." - Lorena, Madrid

While most seem to think that there is no way to have a party that represents the masses, a few protesters correctly pointed out that one step forward would be for the movement to stand its own candidates in the elections next time.



"Thank you for struggling for our future"

The camp is incredibly well organised. There is a kitchen, a crèche, a quiet area and a library stocking all the daily press. Teams of volunteers are delegated to clean up, hand out water and sun cream to protect people from the heat, talk to the press and organise entertainment.

But unfortunately, in terms of a strategy to bring about the 'revolution' they are calling for, the movement is much less organised. Alejandro said "I don't know that we can win the democracy we want but what else can we do? We have no future because of the politicians and



"Attention: this is a revolution" photos Sarah Wrack

their cuts so we will stay here."

Events in Spain clearly demonstrate that as living conditions are driven down by governments around the world and young people see their futures disappearing, mass movements will be inevitable. It is clear to people in Spain that the system is broken, even if there is some confusion about what the alternative should be.

Thousands of banners around the square read "Revolution!" and show hatred towards the bankers, the IMF, the police, capitalism and especially the politicians. The main

chant in the square is "They don't represent us!"

What is needed to achieve the change the protesters are calling for is a socialist programme of demands and struggle. Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI Spain) is calling for the non-payment of the debt and nationalisation of the banks and utilities under democratic working class control.

The workers' movement should give clear support to this movement of the youth and a general strike combined with the protest camps would have huge power.

Interview: "We are London Met Uni, not EasyMet"

In April 2011 London Metropolitan University announced the closure of 70% of its courses, since then a joint campaign by staff and students has been fighting to defend the university. PETE DICKENSON recently interviewed MAX WATSON, chairperson London Met University Unison branch.

Is it clear yet what the proposed course closures will mean for jobs?

It is clear that there will be large-scale job cuts, yes, b o t h

academic and support staff. In addition to the expected large-scale cutting of teaching jobs, we've also just had a redundancy notice informing us they intend to cut 86 support staff and this is just the beginning. We anticipate many, many more in the pipeline.

What action has been taken so far to fight the closures?

We've had protests, lobbies and we've just launched a community-based, cross-union campaign, called 'We are London Met - education not privatisation'. You can pledge to support us by signing our petition called 'We are London Met not EasyMet': <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/support-london-metropolitan-university.html>

The unions are in an official dispute, Unison

has held an indicative ballot for industrial action, with a 64% yes vote to fight compulsory redundancies.

And we have now just announced a ballot for industrial action, in which we predict a high yes vote, coordinated by both Unison and lecturers' union UCU which will open from late May and close in early June.

How close is the cooperation with the other campus unions?

We have very good relations with the other unions. We have regular coordinating meetings with the UCU, and with the student union. Also, support from the local community and other unions has been good - especially through our local anti-cuts committees.

What do you think it will take to successfully fight these attacks?

We will do everything necessary to win. The vice-chancellor has shown he has no interest in the education of working class students in London.

It will probably take more than threatening one day's strike action to win this dispute, and whilst we are hoping of course that the management will back down before it reaches that stage, we are not going to give up without a fight. We'll need all the support we can get.

Slave labour schemes must be resisted

Graham O'Reilly

The supposed training opportunities the government is offering young people are nothing more than a back door way of moving people from the unemployment figures into unskilled work whilst not having to spend any money.

An example of this happened recently in Boots in Southampton, where the manager has agreed to take two people on for work experience. They will receive basic Job-seeker's Allowance of around £45 a week and work a 38 hour week for the next three months, which is equivalent to £1.20 an hour.

When challenged by a member of staff, who is a member of the Socialist Party and Youth Fight for Jobs, about the fact that this will take work away from the fully employed staff, the manager became abusive, accusing him of stirring up trouble.

The manager called him an extremist who has no idea about how the world works and said he was not to talk to other members of staff about his ideas as he was frightening them with his lies.

He also said the people doing the work experience should be grateful for the opportunity.

Over the next seven years between £3 billion and £5 billion of

government money will be paid to various organisations to help tackle 'long term benefit dependency'.

This money is to come from the benefit 'savings' made from people getting back to work. The government trumpeted these organisations as belonging to the voluntary sector.

However of the 18 organisations only two are from the voluntary sector, the rest are private companies. But there is no public accountability within the voluntary or the private sector. This is nothing short of the wholesale privatisation of the unemployed.

Join the Jarrow march!

Join Youth Fight for Jobs marching from Jarrow to London this October to fight for a future for young people! If you want to march, fundraise or organise a protest as part of the march, get in touch: www.jarrow2london2011.wordpress.com www.youthfightforjobs.com youthfightforjobs@gmail.com 020 8558 7947

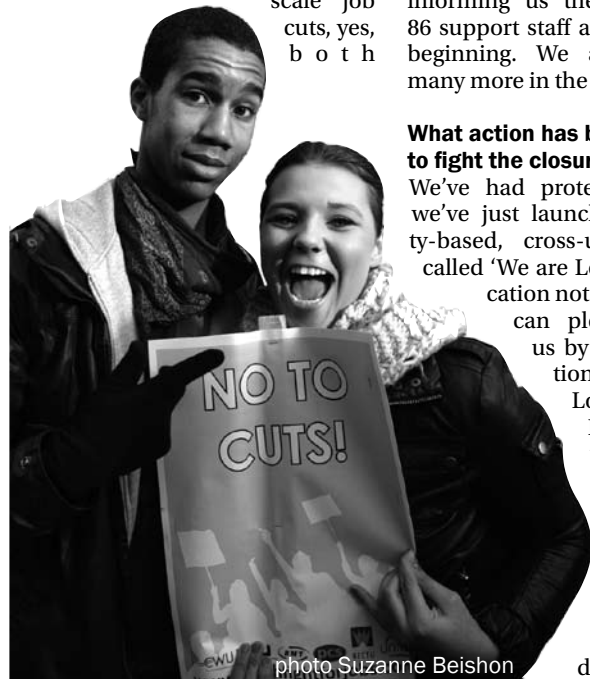


photo Suzanne Beishon