

PROXY OBSERVER

SEÑALAMOS A LOS CULPABLES DE LA VIOLENCIA

Spot Report: Public Workers Challenge Spain's Financial & Political Coup d'état

Prepared for:

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Reference: [#MareaCiudadana](#) (22 February 2015)

INTRODUCTION:

The aim of this spot report is to inform the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on the latest protest by social movements and public sector workers in Madrid.

The report contains details of the route taken, participation, police response and organiser's manifesto. It includes a brief analysis of the event, followed by a conclusion and recommendations for the OSCE / ODIHR to consider.

LOCATION & DATE OF PROTEST

The original protest route which the event organisers had intended to take, was unexpectedly refused by the government delegation in Madrid. The organisers had intended to march from the central *Puerta del Sol* to *Plaza de las Cortes* (near to where the Spanish parliament is located).

BACKGROUND TO THE PROTEST

Those forced changes, meant that the event would not coincide with the symbolic date of a failed royal **coup d'état** on 23rd of February 1981. On that day, Spain's sinister *Guardia Civil* stormed parliament, in an attempt to re-establish a military-style dictatorship with Franco's successor, King Juan Carlos, as head of the armed forces and Head of State.

To say that the 1981 coup failed in its objective to strip Spanish citizens of all their legal, constitutional and human rights, is premature. The coup may have taken 35 years to run its course, but the police state envisaged by **Colonel Tejero** and the mysterious "*white elephant*" behind the coup, is now almost a reality.

Under the pretext of "the crisis", Spain's ultra conservative government has systematically dismantled public services like education and health. They have destroyed millions of jobs, sending thousands of young people into economic exile, while others are evicted from their homes or allowed to die without medical treatment for **curable diseases**.

The backlash response from social movements, public / private sector workers and political activists, to the financial coup, has been to take to the streets in a wave of protests known as *Mareas Ciudadanas* (waves of citizens). The objective of the protests? To recover through democratic means, the rights and liberties stolen by the government since the start of the financial and political coup (otherwise known as "the crisis").

That challenge will become all the more difficult and dangerous under Spain's *Ley Mordaza* (gag law). Spain's financial *golpistas* (coup makers) are determined to stamp out political dissent and enforce silence with repression and Franco-style laws.

PROTEST ORGANISERS:

The organisers behind the *Marea Ciudadana* (wave of citizens) are a veteran group of public sector workers known as **@MareaCiudadanas**. The *Mareas*, are a collective of public sector workers classified by colours: education = *Marea Verde* (green wave), health workers = *Marea blanca* (white wave) see **report**, social workers = *Marea Naranja* (orange wave), etc.

On this occasion Spanish public sector workers were joined by private sector workers, unions, political and social groups, including: Equo, PCE, **PAH** (anti eviction) Coca Cola workers, CGT and CCOO (both trade unions), *Izquierda Unida* and *Podemos* (both political parties).

Other collectives included: victims of mortgage fraud, striking workers (*Madrid Rio*, *TeleMadrid*, *Correos en Lucha*, *Agua Pública*) and "burnt out" Spanish firemen. Also present were republican groups, anti-bull fighting groups, Hepatitis C patients (See Report) a group of immigrants from Ecuador and the wonderful chorus singers known as *Solfónica*.

MEDIA & PRESS:

Protests involving public sector workers receive quite a bit of media exposure, both on mainstream television and mass circulation newspapers. At this event we saw TV channels which normally show little interest in social protest; for example *Antena 3* and *TVE*, the official state channel.

Other less controlled TV channels were there too, including *Hispan TV*, which regularly broadcasts interviews and balanced programmes on social topics. A more liberal Spanish TV channel, known as *La Sexta*, was also there to report on the event.

THE EVENT:

As previously mentioned, the organisers of this event informed the delegation in Madrid with sufficient prior notice. On this, the third such *Marea* of its kind, approximately 2,000 citizens took part. The event was well organised, with an enormous public address system mounted on a lorry at the front of the march.

As the different groups began gathering in Atocha at 12pm, protest stewards positioned themselves at the head of the march to open up the way. Media and TV crews buzzed with excitement, in a frenzy of photograph taking.

Eventually, we were off. Ahead of us, a ridiculous spectacle of approximately eight police vans raving their engines in our faces, pumping even more carbon dioxide into an already **polluted** Madrid atmosphere. This made breathing difficult at times, as the day was unusually hot for winter. The UIP always know how to spoil a party.

Half way there, we stopped briefly in front of the drab *Health Ministry* building for a quick sing-along with *Solfónica*. There, Hepatitis C patients reminded everyone that their sit-in at a local hospital (*Hospital 12 de octubre*) was still ongoing. Then we pressed ahead towards the roundabout in Neptuno. Once there, we turned left and arrived at the *Congreso* (parliament building). Our final destination.

MANIFESTO READING:

Unlike the Greek parliament building in Athens, which recently removed all the metal barriers surrounding it, Spain's *Congreso* still hurriedly erects metal barriers whenever more than twenty Spanish citizens approach the main entrance. On this occasion, it was no different. Corrupt Spanish politicians only feel safe when dozens of police vans filled with hooded police officers armed with huge guns, are there to protect them from ordinary citizens.

This was the sorry sight which greeted baffled protestors as they stood waiting for the manifestos to be read out. Meanwhile, *Marea* organisers had arranged a fun show for the children who had accompanied their tired parents on the march. Strange **pixies** blew soap bubbles while singing gobbledygook songs, reminding the crowd of the type of activity that goes on inside the Spanish parliament (on a serious day).

Eventually, each of the participating groups selected a spokesperson to read out a brief manifesto on stage. More than twelve representatives took part. Among them: education, health, PAH (anti-evictions), *Save TeleMadrid*,

Defend Your Culture, Coca Cola, Fire-fighters, Mail Workers, Madrid Rio and Comuna (in our opinion the best speaker).

Other groups to speak on stage included some very colourful immigrants from Ecuador, and a group of older people supporting victims of Franco's genocidal regime (*Plataforma Contra la Impunidad Franquista*). This group reminded the crowd that to this day, there are still more than 200 streets in Spain with **Franco's name**. One of the last to speak, was an anti-bull fighting pressure group.

Each manifesto varied in content, but common factors included: an immediate end to the *Ley Mordaza*, a rejection of TTIP, criticism of job cuts in the health sector (50,000 so far), the denial of health cards to one million immigrants, a demand to end forced evictions, a call to sack corrupt politicians and a commitment to maintain quality public services.

POLICE PRESENCE:

Even before the start of the event, we learnt from speaking to people that the area around the parliament building, had been heavily "fortified" by national and local police. The total number of police vans used in this wasteful operation was disproportionate by any measure. Nine shiny new vans waited for us at the meeting point in Atocha, and an additional two or three at the *Congreso*.

That's an awful lot of much needed money being wasted unnecessarily on security to protect scared politicians. Not to mention the 90€ /per day that each UIP police officer gets paid from public funds. When one considers that young children and frail pensioners made up the bulk of protestors, it is easy to understand where the government's priorities lie and why the police state never seems to have any money left for essential public services like health and education.

ARRESTS & INJURIES:

No arrests on this occasion. Though dozens of hooded characters with big guns, were seen in the area. Many refusing to correctly identify themselves. No injuries were reported. An ambulance and medical team were at the scene throughout.

SECRET POLICE & INFILTRATORS:

No reports of infiltrators or secret police in the area on the day of the protest. No mass ID checks. No evidence of names being added to a police black list. No video footage of protestors made at the scene. No fines issued by authorities.

THE AUTHORITIES:

Spanish authorities appear stunned by the response from determined social groups to government attempts to limit citizens' legal rights. Hardly a day goes by without another street protest against Spain's spent regime. People are protesting about everything: mortgage fraud, gag laws, deaths of immigrants, attempts to criminalise abortion, bull fighting, the banks, the police state, evictions, health cuts, education reforms...

Spanish people have cornered their corrupt government, and in the process strengthened democracy in Spain. Democracy has never been a priority for the government in Madrid. For the ruling *Popular Party*, concepts such as participation, consensus and dialogue, all appear to "get in the way".

This protest and others before it, are a visual reminder that resistance to government cutbacks continue. For Spanish social movements, the end of the crisis will only come when public services are restored, forced evictions come to an end and the millions of unemployed are back at work.

Essentially, the struggle for social justice in Spain, is now in the streets in the form of peaceful protests, very much in keeping with democratic principles. The response from the government has been to introduce retrogressive Franco style laws, to limit rights and to criminalise street protests. All in a desperate attempt to coerse the population into silence.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS:

Our conclusion is that this protest evidences the fact that Spanish social movements are not about to throw the towel in and give up the fight for social justice. Demonstrations such as this, are a very public affair which allow ordinary citizens, who normally only consume government controlled propaganda, to experience a very different reality to the usual government spin.

Much of the public is unaware of the terrible impact government cutbacks in health and education are having on ordinary people's lives. The human cost in terms of suffering and lost opportunities, is always presented as secondary in importance to profits, economic growth and efficiency.

Social movements play a critical role in Spain's democracy, providing a counter balance to an increasingly hard-line financial dictatorship, which seeks to stamp out even the mildest non-violent dissent through repressive legislation and a police state.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to encourage Spain to re-think its budgets and place more emphasis on social needs.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR encourage Madrid to work towards a more open, inclusive and democratic form of government.

We suggest the OSCE / ODIHR invites the Spanish government to meet representatives of social movements to discuss issues affecting ordinary people.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to raise the issue of Franco-style street names in Spain, with the government in Madrid.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR ask the delegation in Madrid for a detailed breakdown of costs for an average protest.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with Madrid what implications the new gag law (*Ley Mordaza*) will have on pro-democracy movements.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with the Spanish government whether it agrees with the recent *United Nations* report critical of the *Ley Mordaza*.

We suggest the OSCE / ODIHR ask Madrid to explain which factors the Spanish government considers relevant in its assumption that the economic and social crisis in Spain has ended.

Finally, we urge the OSCE / ODIHR to ask the Spanish government whether they agree with King Juan Carlos that **bull fighters** are very "brave" people.

Report date: 28th February 2015

RELEVANT VIDEOS & PHOTOGRAPHS:

Poster of the event:
<http://goo.gl/It3BXI>

VIDEO summary of the protest from La Sexta
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7eMIqhfG1w>

VIDEO report from Diagonal
<https://vimeo.com/120294663>

Photograph of protest crowds
<http://goo.gl/5drZhw>

Photographs, videos and background information on this protest
<http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/marea22f.html>

For more reports on past and future protests
<http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/informes.html>