

A quarter of Spain now unemployed

By Alejandro López
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The Active Population Survey (EPA) this week reported that there are now 5,778,100 unemployed people in Spain, fully 25 percent of the active population. The rate of unemployment rose 0.38 percent in the third quarter, which normally sees unemployment decrease due to temporary hiring of employees in the holiday season.

Around 96,000 workers lost their jobs during the last quarter, more than the previous quarter, making an additional 800,000 unemployed in the last year. Construction was hit hardest, with 56,100 job losses, followed by services with 32,700 more unemployed.

The rate of unemployment among youth between 16 to 25 years of age rose by 0.94 percentage points to 52.34 percent. Among foreign workers, over a third are unemployed at 34.84 percent.

The EPA statistics not only show there are fewer jobs, with 3 million workers looking for a job in the past two years, but that those available are precarious. From July to September 179,400 workers with indefinite contracts lost their jobs, while workers with temporary contracts increased by 15,300.

Employers are using the latest labour reform, passed last February by the Popular Party (PP) government, to make it easier and cheaper to use layoff schemes (known as EREs) to sack workers. Employers are alternatively sacking workers with indefinite contracts, while employing workers on temporary or “work-experience” contracts as replacements.

The number of households where all members are out of work rose by 312,700 over the past year to 1.7 million, a 22 percent increase.

Of the 50 provinces in Spain, 16 have over 30 percent unemployment, including all the provinces in the regions of Andalusia, Canary Islands and Extremadura.

In Catalonia, 15,400 workers have lost their jobs, in Andalusia 33,300 and in Castilla-La Mancha 13,700. Unemployment in the enclave of Ceuta in Africa has

hit a staggering 41.03 percent.

On the same day as the report was issued, the Secretary of State for the Economy, Fernando Jiménez Latorre, declared that starting in mid-2013, “positive figures” on employment will appear. Even more cynical was the statement of current Minister of Economy and Competitiveness Luis de Guindos. Guindos, a former advisor of the collapsed US bank Lehman Brothers, declared that the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) statistics reveal “stabilisation in job destruction.”

That day the PP government also passed a Royal Decree (a law passed by the government which does not go through parliament) that allows companies, entities or stock companies that have a majority of state capital to dismiss their workforce, alleging the same reasons as private sector companies. These public or semi-public companies will be able to sack workers with 20 days of compensation per year, simply by alleging that they have declining sales or revenues for three consecutive quarters.

With this law the government is preparing massive layoffs in the public sector, rather than a “stabilisation in job destruction.”

The statistics published by the INE come on top of those published by the Eurostat showing that Spain has the greatest inequality of the 27 member countries of the European Union (see: “Poverty, hunger and inequality grow in Spain”).

The impact of this social catastrophe was highlighted Thursday, when 54-year-old Miguel Ángel Domingo of Granada hung himself because he was facing eviction. He owned a small newsagent next to his brother’s grocery. On Friday, a man in his 50s threw himself out of a second storey flat when the police came with a judicial commission to evict his family. One of his children was at home and his wife lay in bed on medication for depression. He is currently in hospital

out of danger.

That same day, the police arrested a father whose sixteen-year-old son pointed a loaded gun at them when they came to evict the family. The father has been charged with illegal possession of weapons.

Since 2008, 350,000 evictions have taken place. There are around 3.1 million empty houses in Spain, mostly now the property of the banks which cannot sell them in the market and which are considered “toxic assets.”

Amid the crisis caused by the austerity measures imposed by the right-wing PP government and its Socialist Party (PSOE) predecessor, and facing rampant inflation, rising unemployment and a recession, the Spanish ruling class is preparing a pre-emptive strike against any social rebellion.

Director General of Police Ignacio Cosidó has announced that the next update to the Public Security Law could include an article prohibiting the recording, processing or circulation on the internet of images of police officers. This comes after last month’s savage repression of a demonstration in front of Spain’s parliament by the police, where up to 64 protesters were injured, 16 of whom had to be taken to hospital, and 38 people were arrested.

Thousands of videos and photographs of police brutality were uploaded on the internet. One showed an agent-provocateur in the demonstration being beaten up by his fellow officers while shouting, “I am a companion, I am a companion.”

The new law would mean that anyone publishing images of police brutality would be prosecuted for disrupting the “immense labour of the security forces to progress toward achieving a more just, safer and peaceful society.”

Cosidó announced that the law would also include a penalty for taking part in a protest with a covered face.

The Spanish ruling class and its political representatives are committed to a policy of class war, based on the endless pauperisation of the working class, backed by police violence and state repression.

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