

Spanish government prepares repressive measures against social opposition

By Vicky Short and Alejandro López
6 December 2012

Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) government is preparing to impose some €90 billion in budget cuts over the next two years in order to reduce the deficit to 0.77 percent of gross domestic product.

Aware that these measures will provoke sustained opposition from the working class, the PP has announced it will increase outlays on riot personnel and equipment by 1,780 percent to €3.26 million in 2013 and €10 million by 2017. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the added equipment will include 20,000 bulletproof vests, rubber bullets, shields, tear gas and batons.

The Police Upper Command has set up a new special rapid reaction force, the Protection and Reaction Unit (UPR), which will take over some of the responsibilities of the riot police, including during demonstrations, rallies, public events and any "black spots" identified by local police departments. The UPR will be made up of 10 operating groups, each with 30 policemen and 15 subgroups of motorised officers. Their motto is, "We assume custody and will reestablish order."

The new unit will be one of many others dedicated to repression, like the Reserve and Security Group riot police set up in 2006, whose stated mission is "the restoration of public order at large mass demonstrations", as well as the Public Safety Command Units formed in 2002 as an anti-terrorist force. Both were used against the Asturian miners during their 40-day strike last June.

The Police trade union SUP recently denounced the training practices of the Units of Police Intervention (UIP), the main anti-riot police units. The last such training exercise at the UIP's training centre in Linares (Jaén) ended with eight policemen wounded. One had to be taken to hospital. Four acrylic shields were

broken by the impact of rubber bullets shot at a distance of 30 meters, when the official recommendation is to shoot at a "minimum distance of 50 meters, aiming not directly at the body, but for [the bullet] to bounce on the floor."

The union states that the chief commissar of the UIP insisted that the police must be "more forceful" and expressed disgust at "the softness of some [anti-riot] units."

The wounding of officers in training indicates what is being made ready for protesters.

In most demonstrations, strikes and general strikes, the anti-riot units have not worn badges, numbers or any other form of identification, making it difficult to report violent attacks on demonstrators. Police also wear balaclavas, making it impossible to identify them.

Last month, Director General of Police Ignacio Cosidó 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. Cosidó said the new law would mean that anyone publishing images of police brutality could be prosecuted for disrupting the "immense labour of the security forces toward achieving a more just, safe and peaceful society."

The government also annested four Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan regional police) sentenced to prison for torturing a person in their custody. This is the second amnesty of the same officers, who were first annested last February, before the amnesty was revoked by the Barcelona Provincial Court.

Some 200 judges have written a manifesto denouncing the government amnesty because it "dynamites the division of powers... sending an unequivocal message of contempt to the judiciary by putting it in a subordinate position in the constitutional

order.”

The manifesto adds that the amnesty "seems to encourage behavior that must be expunged from any police force."

The riot police have been particularly vicious since the military was deployed against striking air traffic controllers in December 2010. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained at the time:

“The government of Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) has handed broad powers to the military by imposing a ‘state of alert,’ nullifying basic democratic rights. The action exposes the thoroughly right-wing character of this ‘socialist’ government. In its determination to impose the will of the financial aristocracy, it is taking measures that have not been seen since the end of the fascist regime of General Franco in 1975.”

Since then, violence has increased against anti-austerity protests.

In May 2011, Catalan riot police violently dispersed the peaceful *indignados* from Catalonia Square in Barcelona, leaving 180 injured.

In February 2012, striking 16-to-18-year-old students in Valencia were savagely attacked. The city was flooded with police, who made 43 arrests, including eight minors. Dozens were injured. The chief of police in Valencia, Antonio Moreno, defined the teen protestors as “enemies.”

In June and July of this year, striking Asturian miners were attacked by elite anti-riot units. During a demonstration in Madrid, workers and youth protesting in solidarity with the miners were attacked by police, who fired rubber bullets into the crowd, injuring 76 people. Two miners were arrested as well as 16 demonstrators.

In September, a demonstration organized through social networks in Madrid brought out thousands of protestors seeking to surround the parliament. The police responded by firing rubber bullets and baton-charging the demonstrators. The repression left 64 protesters injured, 16 of whom had to be taken to hospital, and 38 people arrested.

Yago, a 17-year-old, was hit and left unconscious. The violence was cheered by the general secretary of the police union SUP, who stated on Twitter, “We don’t have identification badges, hit them and that’s

it.”

During the last general strike on November 14, the police arrested 50 workers throughout Spain. In Barcelona, they charged a peaceful protest, leaving a woman without an eye after she was hit by a rubber bullet. The regional minister of the interior continues to deny that rubber bullets were used.

The Asociación de Militares Españoles (Association of Spanish Soldiers), an organization of retired soldiers, recently reacted to Catalan moves toward secession by stating that it would intervene to prevent it. A statement warned that those who collaborate with or permit the “fracturing” of Spain will be “answered with the utmost severity” before the military courts and face “the serious charge of high treason.”

Spanish Army Colonel Francisco Alamán warned that Catalonia would be independent only “over my dead body and that of many other soldiers,” and declared that the Spanish army had sworn to defend “the non-negotiable principle of Spain’s unity.”

Ángel Luis Pontijas, a general and director of the magazine *Ejército* (Army), has been suspended from service after an editorial accused Catalan Regional President Artur Mas of provoking “a decline in the credibility of our nation” and a weakening of “national cohesion” because of his move toward secession.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>