

Huge Turnout as Spaniards Protest Stripping of Labor Rights

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Reminiscent of the half-million souls that turned out in LA protesting immigration laws some years back, Spaniards took to the streets across Spain in numbers that approached one million. These protests were/are designed to remind elite powers that everything was built on the backs of workers and not to take the masses for granted.



Up to a million Spaniards marched in cities across Spain Sunday in a massive protest at the new government's drive to strip them of their labor rights under the cover of austerity measures.

In echoes of Wisconsin, the labor 'reforms' proposed by Spain's conservative government would make it easier for companies to fire workers and pull out of collective bargaining agreements.

The country's two main trade unions, CCOO and UGT, organized demonstrations in at least 57 cities under the slogan: "No to the Labor Reforms - Unfair to Workers, Ineffective and Useless to the Economy and for Employment."

Unemployment in Spain has tripled since 2007, and today about 5.2 million people in the country are out of work. The official unemployment rate is running at 23%, and its youth unemployment rate is nearly 50%.

The Associated Press reports:

Spain's main trade unions organized marches in 57 cities, beginning midmorning in southern Cordoba. Some events that had been planned for later in the day, such as in eastern Valencia, had to be brought forward because of the early buildup of large crowds.

Union organizers said around 1 million people had marched by mid-afternoon, but official figures were not released.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's government passed the package of reforms nine days ago in an effort to shake up a labor market seen as one of Europe's most rigid and to encourage hiring in a country battling the highest unemployment rate in the eurozone, at nearly 23 percent. [...]

The government's sweeping changes allow Spanish companies facing declining revenues to pull out of collective bargaining agreements and have greater flexibility to adjust employees' schedules, workplace tasks and wages, as well as making it easier and less costly to fire workers.

"If the government doesn't rectify this, we will continue with an ever-growing mobilization," General Workers Union spokesman Candido Mendez said.

Many protesters wore hats with large scissors on top and shouted, "Don't cut our rights," while others carried placards in the shape of coffins that read, "Negotiation and collective bargaining, RIP."

Office worker Manuela Silvela, 58, said the government's measures were doing nothing to ease the uncertainty felt in Spain.

"Workers who've got jobs now are worried these reforms will make it easy to lose them, and in current conditions, those who don't have work are going to find it impossible to get a job," she said.

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