

Denouncing Austerity: Mass Demonstrations against Financial Coup in Spain

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Hundreds of thousands take to the streets to denounce austerity and defend democracy as corruption scandals shake Spanish royal house and government.

Europe's 2013 protest season finally kicked off this week. On Saturday, three days after the umpteenth general strike [paralyzed](#) Greece, a "citizens' wave" of indignation washed over Spain with hundreds of thousands of protesters swarming onto the streets of Madrid and over 80 cities in yet another major popular outcry against the ongoing financial *coup d'état*. In Madrid, clashes broke out and at least 40 were arrested after police sought to disperse protesters who had once more encircled Parliament.

Saturday's demonstration in Spain was deliberately timed to coincide with the 32nd anniversary of [El Tejerazo](#), an attempted coup d'état by Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero, who in 1981 led a military contingent of 200 armed officers as they stormed into Congress while it was in the process of electing a new Prime Minister. Although King Juan Carlos publicly condemned the coup, *Der Spiegel* last year revealed [secret documents](#) showing that the King privately sympathized with the coup.



For millions of Spaniards, the embarrassing issue of the country's anachronistic aristocracy is enough of a headache already. As Spain's crisis burst out into the open, King Juan Carlos infamously went [elephant-hunting](#) in Botswana, amply displaying the insensitivity and aloofness of the head of state (who also serves as honorary president of the country's WWF branch). Meanwhile, the King's daughter and son-in-law are facing major [corruption charges](#) for multi-million euro fraud and money-laundering.

Still, past military coups and absurd royal scandals are some of Spain's least concerns at the moment. As the economy plunges ever deeper into the abyss, spectacularly missing EU-imposed debt goals by posting a dramatic [10.2 percent](#) budget deficit last year, millions are now at risk of poverty. According to Oxfam, some [18 million Spaniards](#) (almost 40 percent of the population) could face life of destitution by 2022. Decades of development risk coming undone. In the EU, only Bulgaria and Romania have a higher percentage of their population living in such dire circumstances.



With unemployment hitting a shocking [26 percent](#), with over 400.000 families evicted from their homes since the start of the crisis (amounting to a mind-numbing 500 families *per*

day), and with another 53,272 families projected to [lose their homes](#) this year alone, an acute humanitarian crisis is presenting itself. Meanwhile, with the excuse of “balancing the budget”, salaries are being slashed, employees laid off, hospitals privatized, pensions cut, tuition fees hiked, taxes raised, and social spending decimated.

Last year, a quarter of the government budget went to servicing the public debt, while 100 billion euros were wasted to bail out Bankia, itself a conglomerate of bankrupt savings houses. Despite the lavish provision of public funds and the [extravagant bonuses](#) of Bankia’s executives (one of whom was given 6.2 million euros to go into “early retirement”), the bank will next week reveal total losses amounting to more than 19 billion euros, constituting [the largest corporate losses](#) in Spanish history.



All the while, the elephant in the room is a sickening [corruption scandal](#) that continues to plague Rajoy’s conservative government. Last month, Spain’s biggest newspaper *El País* published [secret documents](#) revealing years of endemic corruption at the highest levels of the governing party. Luis Barcenas, the treasurer of the Partido Popular, kept a double account from which secret contributions by Spanish businessmen were redistributed to leading party members. Among the benefactors of the scandal are former Bankia executive and IMF official Rodrigo Rato, as well as Prime Minister Rajoy, who for 10 years netted over 250.000 euros in illegal side-payments.

To make matters worse, much of this money appears to have originated from the construction sector, which experienced a huge boom during the build-up of the Spanish [real estate bubble](#), suggesting that leading politicians greedily took bribes to allow private investors to bypass construction regulations and build on protected lands. In the process, thousands of building projects scarred the Spanish landscape, leaving behind hundreds of uninhabited [ghost towns](#) and destroying much of the country’s once pristine beach lines. When the bubble finally burst, millions of workers in the construction sector lost their jobs and hundreds of thousands lost their homes — while politicians, bankers and businessmen made windfall profits.



The PP corruption scandal confirmed a long-held suspicion among the Spanish population that democratically-elected representatives were largely complicit in causing (and profiting from) the country’s severe financial crisis. Already back in 2011, millions of *indignados* took to the streets to denounce the country’s representative institutions as a [sham of democracy](#), counter-posing the corporate and corrupt practices of their politicians with a genuine form of grassroots democracy practiced through popular assemblies and solidarity networks.

This Saturday, the [Marea Ciudadana](#) — a loose and decentralized coalition of over 200 action groups and movement associations, and itself a product of nearly two years of popular resistance — brought hundreds of thousands of people back to the streets to send yet another message to the government: enough with austerity and debt repayment; enough with political and economic corruption, with banker impunity, royal dishonesty and police brutality; enough with the rule of financial markets and EU/IMF-imposed reforms; enough with this inhumane neoliberal solution to the crisis of capital.



As the PP corruption scandal sent Rajoy reeling and clinging on to power, the government's last remaining fragments of legitimacy are rapidly evaporating. Polls show that [96 percent](#) of Spaniards believe their politicians are thoroughly corrupt, and the persistent mobilization of hundreds of thousands of outraged citizens shows that millions are acutely aware that there is a direct line connecting these corrupt politicians to national businessmen, European institutions, and international finance capital.

And so, exactly 32 years since the *Tejerazo*, the people of Spain are making it known that they will not abide by yet another attempted *coup d'état*. The elephant in the room has been exposed and the emperor is revealed to stand without clothes. The 2013 hunting season has begun. This time around, the hunter will be hunted and the King will be prey — along with the entire blue-blooded financial aristocracy: from Rato to Rajoy and from Bankia to the Troika. ¡Que se vayan todos! It's time for them to go.



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