

Spain attempts to imprison unionists



(1st June 2015) It could have been a farce, but it is way to grave: 8 trade unionist from Airbus 8 are facing severe prison sentences just because they exercised their right to strike.

The public prosecutor's office is asking for 66 years in prison, 8 years and 3 months each for taking part in a picket during a general strike five years ago. Such a penalty has not been given to any unionist since Spain became a democracy in 1972. They are all accused of the exact same crime, attacking the riot police.

*"They are trying to make people believe that an old man like me, at the time soon to be pensioner, was attacking fully equipped riot police", says **José Alcazar**, ex-general secretary of the work council.*

He is attending a meeting with trade union journalists from Norway and other European countries, arranged by EPSU.

Brutal police attack

The alleged crime took place in front of the gate of the Getafe factory during the 2010 general strike against the reform of the employment laws – a strike resulting in a brutal police assault on the workers.

Several hundred workers and people from the industrial area on the outskirts of Madrid gathered outside the factory of Airbus 8.

"When I arrived to the factory the national police and the riot police was in front of the gate. The atmosphere was extremely tense, and I feared that something bad was going to happen", Alcazar tells the journalists from EPSU.

Shooting in the air

In an effort to calm the situation, Alcazar identified himself to the police and talked with them, hoping to reduce the increasing tension.

Instead, the riot police loaded their guns, prepared to shoot. People panicked and tried to run into the factory. In the turmoil's that followed, the riot police shot seven times in the air, forcing people to flee in fear.

Serious accusations

The day after the riot the police came at Alcazar's door with serious accusations. José Alcazar, six other members of the Workers' Commissions (CCOO, and one UGT member) were all accused of attacking the riot police, and violating strikers rights.

"A blatant lie", says Alcazar.

"A security guard from the company, who could confirm their story and witness on their behalf, were dismissed by the judge. Now the only witnesses are from the police", tells Alcazar.

During the first preliminary hearing the Airbus 8 workers turned down the public prosecutor's offer to reduce the penalty from 8 years and 3 months to 2 years.

"We would have to admit that we were guilty, and that is out of the question. We have been fighting for freedom all our lives. And without the right to demonstrate there is no freedom", states Alcazar.

Charges still stand

As a result, the charges still stand. The only hope the Airbus 8 workers and trade unionists have, is that the law changes, the objectionable Article 315.3 of Spain's

Penal Code, who calls for prison sentences for trade unionists who take part in informational picket lines during a strike.

In July Alcazar and his former colleagues are going to meet in court again.

"I hope you will tell people in other European countries what is happening in Spain. This is a coordinated attack on union and labour rights from the government. If we have to go to prison for our right to strike, we will", says Alcazar.

Many similar cases

Unfortunately this is not the only case in Spain. In similar cases prison sentences have been given to five UGT members; two of them for 5 years and three of them for 3.5 years. At the moment more than 300 other Spanish trade unionists and members are facing prison sentences under the same law.

These cases show that the government in Spain attempt to intimidate the working class, strangle protest and criminalize unions.

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