

Spain's 'Indignados' Want Greater Say In Politics

By Sylvia Poggioli, npr news, May 23, 2011

1 Spain's ruling Socialists suffered massive losses in local elections Sunday. Voters punished the government for the poor economy, tough austerity measures and Europe's highest unemployment rate.

The election came against the backdrop of snowballing sit-ins filling Spanish cities. Dubbed the 5 *indignados* — angry ones — the protesters want greater citizen participation in the political process.

Madrid's central square, Puerta del Sol, has become an urban encampment — with tents, chairs, couches and mattresses under blue tarpaulins.

Volunteers provide day care for children, there are committees for cleaning and legal affairs, and daily assemblies discuss the agenda. An announcer warns it's hot, so people should drink a lot of 10 water.

One slogan says, "Put your beer down; raise your voice."

At the food stand, Antonio Gomez says local restaurants help feed the campers, providing ham, sausages, bread, cheese, "and also vegetables and fruit, because many people are vegetarian."

A group of middle-aged women brings bags of food. Flor Gonzalez says they've come in solidarity 15 with those who have been called Spain's lost generation. "They have no future," she says. "All they have is this new community."

The sit-in started a week ago — it took everyone by surprise. On Monday, 300 people came. On Tuesday, police moved them out. Twitter and Facebook did the rest. By Wednesday, thousands were camping out — not only in Madrid, but also in a dozen other cities.

20 Cristina Ruiz, a 42-year-old lawyer, is thrilled to be part of a civic society in the making. "In Spain," she says, "we don't have experience in feeling like a community and feeling the power of citizenship."

The movement has no leaders. Its members are not just bohemians and leftists, but also conservatives. What they share is anger, lack of opportunities and the sense that they've been 25 deprived of their future.

Juan Lopez is one of several spokesmen of what the media calls the new Spanish revolution.

"We are not against the system," he says, "but we want a change in the system. Also, we think that the voice of the people is not being listened [to]. We want a change in the future — not in the future; we want a change in the present. We demand a change, and we want it now, right now."

30 Lopez is 30 years old. Six months ago, he lost his job as a marketing manager at a multinational IT company. He's a sample of one of Spain's most devastating statistics — not only does the country have Europe's highest unemployment rate, but also, nearly half of those younger than 30 are jobless.

So far, Spain has not needed an international bailout like Greece, Ireland and Portugal. But tough austerity measures have left the economy stagnant. Many slogans here take aim at international 35 finance.

Marketing analyst Xavier Leon lost his job two years ago, and he has a heavy mortgage. He blames the banks. "The bankers from Lehman Brothers, Barclays Bank, Spanish bankers — all must be in jail."

By evening, the crowd swells to tens of thousands, and spills into neighboring streets.

40 In an impressive demonstration of collective self-discipline, Spain's *indignados* have produced Europe's biggest protest movement.

The message in their slogan is clear: "If you take away our dreams, we won't let you sleep."