

news



Arab spring to European summer?

Spanish protesters who took to the streets last week say they were influenced by their English counterparts and believe similar demonstrations could spread across Europe.

An estimated 50,000 people occupied a square in Madrid, forming a makeshift campsite complete with library, children's nursery and a kitchen offering free food donated by businesses.

Organisers wrote a manifesto calling for greater democracy and an end to government corruption, and said their movement, known as 15-M, was the beginning of a social and political revolution in the country.

English example

Beatriz Pérez, a spokesperson for 15-M who had been camping in the square since the second day of the protests, said: "We're very tired of the situation in Spain. There are high unemployment rates and people cannot see a solution. I think the

people are in the street because they have hope – that's the most important thing."

Pérez, 29, described how the movement was encouraged by the recent protests in Tunisia and Egypt, and had also learned from the student demonstrators in Britain.

"I think you are an example to us, because you protest a lot," she said. "We see how you protest in England, the French protest in France ... So I think you are an inspiration."

Many of those protesting in Madrid were young graduates, unhappy that the government has spent billions of euros bailing out banks but failed to invest in jobs to secure their future.

Twenty-year-old student Alejandro Jalón came to the square in the capital, Puerto del Sol, because he believed change was necessary.

"A lot of people have two degrees, speak English, French, German, and they don't have a

Last week's protests in Madrid.

Photo: Ryan Gallagher

job," he said. "Or they have to work in a building site or a call centre. That's not a job for people with two degrees."

More than 4.3 million people are unemployed in Spain. Youth employment is around 40 per cent.

Older residents came out to offer their support and congratulate the organisers.

Sixty-six-year-old Manuel Ferreira said the camp at Puerto del Sol reminded him of the student protests in France in 1968.

Change the system

"It's the same war against capital, against power, against politicians, against establishment and so on," he said. "But it is more significant, because, through Facebook and the internet, this movement is worldwide. I am sure it will spread."

The demonstrations in Spain coincided with regional elections that the right-leaning Popular Party (PP) won by a landslide.

For many at Puerto del Sol, though, the election result was a foregone conclusion and only reaffirmed their belief that the system needs to be reformed.

"We don't care about the elections – we care about the future of our country," said Juan, a spokesperson for 15-M. "We are not against the system; we want to change the system – so that the people can be better represented."

Eviction fears

Twice daily, organisers held a general assembly at the camp to discuss proposals they planned to present to the government. Decisions were not taken until everyone was in agreement.

"The leadership is our assembly, where the decisions are taken by consensus," said Juan. "Many people think that this doesn't work – but the reality is we are where we are because of this consensus."

Among the demands tabled were calls for electoral reform, the dissolution of the Spanish

'People w your hous

Four children share their insights on life below the poverty line in a BBC TV programme to be broadcast next week.

Accounts by Courtney, 8, Paige, 10, Sam, 11, and his sister Kayleigh 16, in *Poor Kids* reveal a troubling picture of deprivation in the UK.

With 3.5 million children living in poverty, Courtney, from Bradford, says about her future: "I'm going to find it hard – I don't want to grow up."

Courtney describes how when she is at school she has dinner but when she's at home she goes without.

Extensive damp

"It's because my mum hasn't got any money and she owes people money," she explains.

Poor children are two and a half times more likely to suffer

parliament's second chamber, and an end to a policy of salaries for life for politicians.

The protests were backed by trade unions but there were fears of eviction after a government committee declared the camp illegal.

Despite rumours of a police crackdown, however, many at Puerto del Sol said they would occupy the square indefinitely – or until their demands were met – and hoped to inspire similar demonstrations across Europe and the rest of the world.

"I'm really proud," said Raul Bartolome, 38. "I don't know if it will get better or not. But just the fact that we've been able to do this shows that young people are not just fooling around and doing nothing. I really think we're living some kind of revolution."

RYAN GALLAGHER

Got a story? Contact 0161 831 5563 or email: news@bigissuenorth.co.uk

News in brief

will bully you because use isn't fancy like theirs'



Above: Sam. Below: Chantelle and Courtney.

chronic illness. Courtney suffers from extensive eczema, which flares up when she is under stress.

"Every time I get mad with my mum I sneak upstairs and scratch it until it bleeds," she says. "It makes me feel calmer."

Courtney's family have never been on holiday together. "Our family can't do anything that other kids can do," she says.

Her unemployed single mum struggles to buy her toys or clothes but Courtney is never self pitying.

"We're different because we can't do that much in our house. People with more money will have more stuff to play with in their garden and in their house."

Paige, 10, from Glasgow lives in a high rise flat; the damp is so extensive that she has mould growing on the blinds in her bedroom. In the programme she tries to cut out the mould with scissors while explaining that she is being bullied in school.

"Some people will bully you because your house isn't all fancy like theirs. How would they feel if they were in a house like this? They wouldn't really like it. It's not our fault it's a

mess – it's just the way the dampness is," she says.

Paige feels government spending cuts are going to make life even harder for children.

Her friend shows viewers her flat, where even Paige is shocked by the dampness.

The friend explains: "Everyone in my house is not well. When I pick my little sister up she smells of mould, and she's always not well.

I cannot go to school often because I have chest infections.

Eleven-year-old Sam wears his sister's hand-me-down uniform to school and, despite being bullied and feeling angry and at times lonely, tries to remain positive.

Self-esteem

"I have to re-use my sister's shirts and then I get called a girl but it doesn't matter if you wear a girl's shirt, ripped trousers or a girl's blazer – it matters who you are."

Sam's 16-year-old sister Kayleigh says: "You don't have the money to get clothing and it's all about what you wear in school so this sparks bullying. The bullying then lowers your self-esteem and you end up hurting yourself to make yourself feel better. I did try and take my own life when I was younger, I was so confused."

Poor Kids will be shown on BBC1 at 10.35 on 7 June and at Sheffield Doc/Fest on 11 June.

KELLY MATTISON



ROAD SAFETY

Seven of the ten most persistently high risk roads in the country are in the north, according to a new report by the Road Safety Foundation. The most dangerous remains the notorious A537 from Macclesfield to Buxton. Fatal or serious collisions between 2004-06 and 2007-09 rose by a total of 12 per cent on the 10 roads, says the report, Simple Measures Save Lives, which nevertheless concludes that Britain's roads are getting safer overall.

LAST ORDERS

Leeds MP Greg Mulholland has called for a boycott of beer made by Carlsberg because it is closing the famous Tetley's Brewery at Brewery Wharfe in the city. The Lib Dem MP has tabled an Early Day Motion calling on beer lovers to "express their anger at the decision" over the closure on 17 June, which will end 189 years of production at the brewery.

HOMELESS HELP

A group of current and former residents from Stockport Homes' temporary accommodation schemes has begun to provide "move-on packs" to homeless families in the area after raising over £900 selling Christmas cards and raffle tickets. The H3 group has funded more than 100 packs, containing a range of items, from kettles and toasters to crockery, cutlery and irons to help homeless people in Stockport get back on their feet.

LOTTERY AWARDS

Eleven organisations from the North West and Yorkshire and Humber are among the semi-finalists in the National Lottery Awards, the annual search to find the UK's favourite Lottery-funded projects. Since the National Lottery began in 1994, over £25 billion has been raised for good causes and over 350,000 grants have been awarded for projects across the arts, sport, heritage, charities, health, education and the environment. Vote for your favourite good cause from 31 May at www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/awards.