



New Internationalist

The people, the ideas, the action in the fight for global justice

This is not the Spain I knew

New Internationalist Easier English

Ready Lesson: Int /Upp Int

Focus: Developing reading skills, discussion skills & essay-writing skills

Speaking: Which of these are true of your country? Discuss

1. The Government is privatising* a lot of valuable things which belong to the state
2. Poverty has doubled since 2007 because of huge increases in unemployment
3. The Government is selling the National Health Service to companies that are sometimes very close to government and party members
4. More and more middle-class families have been joining the queues at the soup-kitchens**
5. Politicians are not doing anything about the problems which affect people
6. Many people are emigrating***

* selling public organisations to private companies; ** places which provide free food to people with no money; *** leaving your own country to live in another one

Reading



- Read the article quickly (5 minutes) to find any other ways in which the situation in Spain is similar or different to your country

[http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/This is not the Spain I knew](http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/This_is_not_the_Spain_I_knew)

- Talk to two other students and find out if the situation in their country is similar or different

In 2008 my English husband and I moved to Spain. Our childhoods had been very similar: we both had a good education, with high levels of well-being, happiness and security. I spent summers in England to improve my English; he had stayed with French and German friends. Our parents had owned the houses where we grew up. Our paths in life had been quite similar, until they eventually came together in Oxford, which is where we met and got married. The main difference was our family backgrounds: my husband's parents are lawyers; my mum is a low-level state employee; my dad worked in a car factory. My dad likes to say that our family is 'Spanish lower middle-class'.

We moved to Spain because we thought that it was a country where families like mine would be able to enjoy excellent, and cheap, standards of living and opportunity. We also hoped that our children would be able to grow up in a healthy and stable environment. In Britain I would have to spend a fortune to cook a healthy meal, but Spain had fresh local food markets where families shop every day, which makes it easy and cheap to find good quality food. Instead of depending on supermarkets like I would in Britain, in Spain I would be able to use small family businesses. These businesses give Spanish cities more variety than British ones, and also benefit a local, family-owned economy. It was easy for me and my brother to go to university. There was also our Spanish National Health System, which is admired internationally.

The current conservative People's Party government is slowly destroying all of these things. It is privatising a lot of valuable things which belong to the state. For example, it is selling the NHS to companies that are sometimes very close to government and party members. Because of this more than a million immigrants have no access to a doctor, and there are massive cuts to helps for people with severe disabilities. People now have to pay for medicine from the pharmacy. The government is planning to introduce a very unpopular education law which will reduce free education and make it much more difficult for people to go to university. People who work in public jobs now have lower salaries, fewer holidays, and some employees sometimes have to work 12-hour shifts so that the Government can save money.

Other sections of society are also suffering. Poverty has doubled since 2007 because of huge increases in unemployment, falling salaries, increasing bank charges and rising taxes. The price of basic services, such as electricity, has increased by 65 per cent in only three years. The government has even passed a bill to charge people money if they use solar panels to generate electricity. This makes Spain the only country in the world to make people pay more for using green energy! People who work for themselves have to pay at least 283 euros every month to the government even when they don't earn any money.

Although self-employed people still have access to a doctor, they do not always receive unemployment benefits if they need them, and they might not even receive a state pension when they retire. The money that people pay in taxes is just used to pay Government debt, which is like a black hole. More and more middle-class families have been joining the queues at the soup-kitchens. Politicians argue that ordinary Spanish people have spent more money than they have earned; but it is also important to remember that Spain has experienced a lot more corruption than other European countries.

Because of the political system high-level positions are often 'inherited' by the next person on the party list: in Madrid, neither the Mayor nor the President of the Regional Community has been elected. Politicians are not doing anything about the problems which affect people, for example the dishonest practices of banks, which used a corrupt scheme to steal the savings of thousands of older people. The politicians are also doing nothing about the [scandal](#) around the theft of babies from maternity hospitals over 30 years, or the extremely high levels of unemployment. One current 'solution' to the economic crisis is a huge ugly casino complex called Eurovegas, which many people think is just another opportunity for more corruption.

There is only so much people can take. Recently it was even discovered that the Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy was [telling lies lying to Congress](#) - and nothing happened! And the situation is going to get even worse. The Government is now planning to limit people's right to protest about these many injustices. They want to introduce a law to make actions such as tweeting about a demonstration or taking part in a peaceful sit-down protest illegal, which would be a serious attack on our democratic rights.

The Spain which I grew up in is disappearing. Very large numbers of people are emigrating. This includes not only highly-qualified scientists but also poets and writers. This makes me worry because it is poets and writers who preserve and promote human values. The last time a generation of poets and writers left was the year 1939, which was the year that the fascist dictator General Franco took power.

Discussion

Think about the situation in Spain and other European countries, and think of three things which you think should be done to make the situation better (by government and ordinary people):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Next, get into a group with two or three other students and decide which three of your solutions are the best.

Finally, present your solutions to the whole class, and try to agree as a group which three solutions would be a) most fair and b) most effective

Homework – writing

- For homework, plan and write an essay in response to the following question:
- *Some people think that ordinary people in Europe should ‘tighten their belts’ in response to the economic crisis. What do you think?*
- Use examples from your own knowledge and experience to support your arguments
- Remember to include an introduction and a conclusion, and to write in clear paragraphs.
- Read the original article:

<http://newint.org/blog/2013/12/04/spain-austerity-government/>