

## Big protests in Spain against health care reforms

February 17 2013, by Harold Heckle

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Protesters march as they hold a banner reading "Health care system not for sale" during a demonstration against regional government-imposed austerity plans to restructure and part-privatize the health care sector in Madrid, Spain, Sunday, Feb. 17, 2013. Madrid proposes selling off the management of six of 20 public hospitals and 27 of 268 health centers. Spain's regions are struggling with a combined debt of \$190 billion as the country's economy contracts into a double-dip recession triggered by a 2008 real estate crash. (AP Photo/Andres Kudacki)

(AP)—Thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of 16

Spanish cities Sunday to protest plans to part-privatize the public health care system, with some questioning the government's motives.

It was the third "white tide" demonstration in Madrid, named after the color of the medical scrubs many protesters wear. But it was the first time cities other than the capital took part, including Barcelona, Cuenca, Murcia, Pamplona, Toledo and Zaragoza. Protesters marched carrying banners saying "Public health is not to be sold, it's to be defended."

Health care and education are administered by Spain's 17 semiautonomous regions. Some indebted ones, like Madrid, have announced the part-privatization of some services, with some people openly suspicious that the move is more a political-motivated ploy than an attempt to cut costs.

Civil servant Javier Tarabilla, 31, said Spain's welfare state was being dismantled to be handed over to the private sector.

"This is pillaging of our public services, looting something we've all contributed to through taxes, to give it to private companies to run for profit," he said.

Madrid regional health councilor Javier Fernandez-Lasquetty has called the protests irresponsible, saying public money savings were essential to lift Spain out of debt and onto the road of [economic recovery](#).

"These protests create conflict and are not in the interest of public health, but they do favor the interests of those who organize them," Fernandez-Lasquetty said.

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