

# General strike in Spain against anti-labour laws and austerity measures

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29 September 2010

Workers are striking today in opposition to the austerity measures and anti-labour reforms implemented by the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government of President José Zapatero.

The general strike has been called by the Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO) and Unión General del Trabajo (UGT) trade union federations. It is the second major protest this year.

The fact that the one-day strike has been called weeks after the PSOE's anti-labour reforms were passed into law testifies to the union leadership's opposition to any serious mobilisation against the financial elite's assault on jobs, wages and social benefits.

The centre piece of the new labour laws is legislation that removes legal protections for workers and makes it easier for employers to sack employees. The unions called the strike only after the entire process of introducing, debating and voting on the laws had been completed. Union leaders had claimed that the reforms could be altered during an amendments session in the legislature. Instead, the PSOE rejected every amendment and the laws were adopted without changes.

Spain is suffering depression levels of unemployment and social misery. It is under these conditions that the PSOE is making it easier for companies to fire workers. Reassuring employers' organisations that were concerned the anti-labour law measures did not go far enough, Labour Minister Celestino Corbacho said, "Time will tell. It is probably more far-reaching than some imagine and believe, and if that is so, it means the reforms are good."

The unions have organised strikes and protests only in order to dissipate political opposition in the working class. They have deliberately limited the impact of walkouts.

In advance of the actions, the UGT and CC.OO have held negotiations with both the national government and local opposition Popular Party administrations, signing on to substantial minimum services agreements. These give the government a say in deciding how many workers are involved and what level of service is provided.

Zapatero has made clear that he is prepared to impose whatever cuts are demanded by the European Union and International Monetary Fund, regardless of the devastation to the population. In May, his government introduced a €15 billion austerity package that includes a 5 percent reduction in civil service pay, cuts in pensions, an increase in the retirement age and cuts in government capital spending programmes.

Zapatero declared earlier this month that regardless the scale of today's general strike, he will not alter his policies. Soon after the anti-labour laws passed, he visited Wall Street to reassure US bankers that his government would deepen its austerity drive.

The collaboration between the government and the trade unions in implementing the attacks has assumed the form of strategic planning. Further meetings between the government and the unions are planned.

Praising the government/union partnership, Zapatero said earlier this month, "Even if a general strike takes place on September 29, I will continue dialogue with the labour unions the following day."

Zapatero knows that his political allies in the unions will mount token displays of opposition but are fundamentally committed to working with the employers and the government. Zapatero invited the unions to continue pension reform talks immediately after the strike.

The unions have been provided political cover by the Stalinist-controlled Izquierda Unida (United Left—IU)

and the Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anti-Capitalist Left—IA). Claiming that the right-wing policies of the social democratic government can be reversed by political pressure, these fake “left” organisations work to prevent a break by the workers from the union bureaucracies and a genuine struggle against the government.

The IU is politically led by the Stalinist Partido Comunista de España (Communist Party of Spain). It is fully integrated into the CC.OO bureaucracy and is a longstanding political ally of the PSOE. The IA was formerly the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria, the Spanish section of the Pabloite United Secretariat. It is the sister organisation of Olivier Besancenot’s New Anti-Capitalist Party in France.

The IA was a faction of the IU until it split from the latter organisation in 2008. It broke reluctantly from the IU because it was being discredited by the Stalinist organisation’s increasingly right-wing orientation to the PSOE. However, the IA immediately re-entered negotiations with the IU, and in the run-up to the general strike it has re-established its political alliance with the Stalinists.

Even as the unions have sabotaged strikes, such as the Madrid Metro workers’ walkout this summer, the IU and IA have hailed the sellout deals negotiated by the union leadership. During the June/July industrial action by the Metro workers, they described the union strike committee, which eventually called off the strike and imposed a wage cut, as a model for future working class struggles.

The summer protests, including the one-day general strikes, have provided the working class with a bitter lesson in the pro-government policies of the union bureaucracy. In Spain and throughout Europe, the trade unions are collaborating with their respective governments to push through brutal austerity measures.

In Greece, the social-democratic PASOK government has been able to legislate ever more onerous cuts despite mass popular opposition thanks to the trade unions, which have used one-day strikes and protests to channel discontent into token actions and thereby fuel discouragement among the masses. The same pattern is repeated in country after country.

Two essential conclusions must be drawn by Spanish workers:

First, in its immediate battles the working class

cannot entrust its future to the trade unions. The success of an offensive by the working class depends on the construction of new, mass organisations of class struggle. Such organisations must be built in a rebellion against the official trade union apparatuses.

Second, working people must face the fact that the PSOE government they elected in 2004, as an alternative to the despised, right-wing, pro-war Popular Party, is now the main instrument in facilitating the destruction of jobs, wages, working conditions and living standards.

Workers must turn consciously to the building of a new party that advances a revolutionary, socialist programme. Such a party must reject from the outset demands that the working class pay for a crisis not of its making and put at the centre of its perspective the unity of workers in Spain with workers throughout Europe and internationally.



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