

Unions call off strike by metro and bus workers in Barcelona

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The strike planned for February 27 to March 1 by workers of the Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona (TMB), the main public transit operator, was called off on Sunday.

The bus and metro workers were to strike against cuts in public transport services, an increase of 38 percent in ticket prices and the breach of the collective bargaining agreement.

Management has not paid the consumer price index (CPI) increase for 2011, which means 700 euros for each worker. The CPI increase for 2012 has also not been added to salaries, which will mean 800 euros less for each worker per year.

The strike was supported by the majority of the 7,400 workers at TMB and set to coincide with the World Mobile Congress, which has an annual attendance of approximately 60,000 people from more than 200 countries.

Initially the strike received the token support of CC.OO, UGT and the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación General del Trabajo (General Confederation of Labour-CGT) which dominates the works council (*Comité de empresa* in Spain) of the buses and metro.

After the strike was announced on February 8, a campaign of intimidation was launched against the workers. The ruling nationalist party in Catalonia, Convergència i Unió (CiU), reacted by attempting to convince the central government in Madrid, led by the right-wing Popular Party, to limit the right to strike. Duran I Lleida, spokesperson of CiU, declared, “The right to strike and the right to protest must never be against the general interest.”

The mayor of Barcelona, Xavier Trias of the CiU, demanded “high” minimum services in order to effectively make the strike useless.

The City Council of Barcelona passed a proposal by the PP, with support of almost all groups, requesting the mayor intensify mediation with TMB unions to call off the strike. The Stalinists and Greens of ICV-EUiA (Initiative for Catalonia Greens and United and Alternative Left) abstained.

On Saturday, the metro workers called off the strike and accepted the proposal through a referendum promoted by management and the Barcelona City Council with the support of the CGT.

The CGT plays a particular political role of sucking in workers disenchanted with the bigger union federations by using radical and militant phraseology. Its origins lie in a split with the anarchist CNT in 1979 on the basis of supporting standing in trade union elections.

To force through the yes vote the Metro Works Council did all it could to prevent an assembly being set to discuss the position. Eventually, under pressure they were forced to call an assembly, but there they only read out the management proposal.

The deputy mayor of Barcelona and president of TMB, Joaquim Forn, threatened the workers with retracting his proposal to pay what was owed to them in two installments, one in 2013 and the other in 2014. He said that files would be opened and sanctions imposed on striking workers.

In the entrance of the depot, a banner made by the bus workers stated, “Do not kneel for a few crumbs. Do not bow your heads without a fight”.

The bus workers decided to call an assembly on Sunday night. Under cries of “parasites” and “traitors”, the main unions of CC.OO and UGT called for a vote to end the strike and the acceptance of the management proposal. Instead, the majority of workers decided to end the strike but without accepting the proposal of

management.

Miguel Arias, a member of UGT and chairman of the Bus Works Council, said, “We have time and the will to negotiate a better deal with the company.” He added that the metro and bus services are “two different companies” and “maintaining unity was difficult.”

This defeat is a green light for the City Council and for TMB to make redundancies. TMB has also planned to make cuts of 56 million euros.

The pseudo-left groups played their role in this betrayal.

El Militante, the former Spanish section of the International Marxist Tendency, published an article on the meetings between metro and bus workers of the TMB praising the “existing unity between employees” and “the unity of action by all the trade unions of both works councils”.

It has said nothing after this “unity of action” dissolved into thin air.

The Pabloite *Izquierda Anticapitalista* has not published a single article on the dispute.

En Lucha (In Struggle), the Spanish affiliate of the British Socialist Workers Party, gave two reasons for the defeat—the City Council having “played its cards well” and the unions not offering “any alternative” and allowing “workers to debate”.

They end by saying that even in the case of this defeat, there has been “a small victory” because the government has announced that they will discount 80 percent of some ticket fees for the unemployed.

Clase contra Clase (Class against Class) manages to blame all the unions except CGT-Metro for the betrayal, which can still be entrusted with leading a fight and to act as “the organized sector” grouping the working class together.



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