

Spain: Unions send striking miners on phoney jobs march

Vicky Short, Paul Mitchell
2 July 2012

Around 8,000 miners in regions across Spain have been on strike since May 31 against cuts to subsidies that could mean the end of coal mining and the destruction of about 50,000 mining and related jobs.

On June 22, 80 striking miners set out from Mieres in the region of Asturias on a 250-mile “Black March” organised by the Communist Party-led Workers Commissions trade union (CC.OO), the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)-aligned General Workers Union (UGT), and some smaller unions. They will join up with a further 80 workers from Villablino and Bembibre (Castille and León) and 46 from Andorra (Teruel) and have the company of various trade union bureaucrats for short periods of time, exploiting a photo opportunity.

The march will arrive in Madrid on July 11 and set up a camp outside the Congress building. This is likely the same day that Popular Party (PP) prime minister Mariano Rajoy will appear in Congress to explain details of the April budget and the €100 billion bank bailout in early June. The budget contained €27 billion (US\$34 billion) in cuts demanded by the “troika”—the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank—including a 64 percent cut to mining subsidies, from €703 million to €253 million.

The unions do not object in principle to the cuts in subsidies. Their complaint is that the PP has brought them forward, reneging on a five-year Plan for Coal agreement signed last year with the previous PSOE government, which extended subsidies until the year 2018.

The stated aim of the march is to pressure the

government to return to the agreement. The banner at its head reads, “The mining industry wants a solution, Industry Minister. Agreement Now!”

The CC.OO’s web site declares that the aim of the march “is to demand of those who have the duty to govern, to manage and to resolve the social problems” and states that mining communities will fight for the government to fulfil the original deal.

However, last week, Industry Minister José Manuel Soria made clear that there would not be any change in policy, declaring that “there is no margin for manoeuvre” and that the cuts to subsidies would go ahead. He gave the same message to PP deputies from the mining regions who pleaded with him to compromise, saying that “the objective is the control of the public deficit.”

The organising of the “Black March” is a further attempt by the union bureaucracy to isolate the miners’ strike and not link it with a unified struggle against the savage austerity measures being implemented against all sections of workers and youth.

For five weeks now, the mining communities have been invaded by riot police and the hated civil guard, lashing out with their truncheons, rubber bullets and tear gas. Miners have responded by erecting burning barricades across roads, motorways and railway lines—most recently, at the end of last week, when hundreds of miners disrupted traffic in Palencia and 200 miners’ wives did likewise on the N-630 highway in Leon.

On June 18, a general strike was called in the mining

valleys, which received almost total support. But the action has been deliberately confined to mining communities by the trade unions, which are hostile to any wider mobilisation of the working class against the government and the troika.

That is why the march is organised purely on the issue of subsidies to the mining industry, deliberately ignoring the devastation caused by other austerity measures—many of which the unions agreed to in the “Grand Social Pact” with the previous PSOE government and employers.

In Asturias, where the majority of miners are employed, the PSOE, which rules in coalition with the United Left, has been at the forefront of the campaign to put pressure on the PP to reverse its decision on the cuts to mining subsidies. While it organises food and accommodation for the striking miners, the same administration has just announced cuts amounting to €498 million that will see 1,000 workers, many of them poorly paid temporary teachers, lose their jobs.

The aim of all those promoting the march is not to defend jobs, but to work as hard as they can to prevent the immense anger and opposition that has built up within Spain from finding an independent political expression. They fear that the miners’ determined and militant action could become a catalyst for a unified offensive by workers and youth.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for the mobilisation of workers throughout Spain in defence of all jobs and living conditions against the Rajoy government and the troika, in the fight for a workers’ government.

Central to this must be the formation of new organisations of working class struggle, such as neighbourhood, factory and workplace committees, independent of the unions. Organisations such as the CC.OO and UGT are not workers’ organisations, but arms of corporate management and the state.

The same applies to the PSOE and the United Left, which serve the interests of the ruling class. It was the PSOE that first began implementing the troika’s diktats

when it was in government, and both parties continue to oppose any measures that endanger the ability of the Spanish bourgeoisie to make the cuts demanded by the global speculators.

The defence of jobs and living standards comes into immediate conflict with the profit interests of a tiny layer of the population that controls the banks and major corporations. There can be no solution to the economic and social crisis as long as these institutions exercise a dictatorship over the economy.

The alternative to capitalism is socialism: the democratic and rational control of production in the interests of social need, not private profit.

It is to a socialist and internationalist perspective that workers and youth in Spain must turn. Conditions in Spain are replicated throughout the whole of Europe. Whether in Madrid, Athens, Paris, Lisbon or Dublin, the working class faces a common enemy in the troika, which is backed by all national governments, the social democratic parties and the trade unions. Their power can only be broken through a united class offensive across all national borders in the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact