

Pseudo-left apologists for unions' betrayal of Spanish miners

Alejandro López
9 July 2012

The strike by 8,000 miners in the northern provinces of Asturias, León and Aragón, now more than 40 days old, indicates the broad opposition to the austerity measures imposed by the right-wing Popular Party (PP) government.

The strike erupted at the end of May when the government announced that it was imposing a 64 percent cut in subsidies to the coal industry, threatening 50,000 jobs in mining and related occupations. The PP was continuing the previous Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government's policy of ending the subsidies. The PSOE had done so by collaborating with the unions, which had agreed to an end to the subsidies for 2018. But the PP's decision to bring the plans forward provoked a backlash of an insurrectionary character amongst miners.

The union bureaucracy has tried ever since to channel the struggle into a dead end.

The "Black March", which ended last Sunday, saw 200 miners from the northern regions march to the capital, Madrid. Aside from this token effort, however, the two main unions, the CCOO (Comisiones Obreras—Workers' Commissions) and the UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores—General Union of Workers), have done everything to isolate the struggle in the mining areas and confine it to the question of subsidies, preventing it from becoming a focus of the widespread anger towards the PP government.

In this task, the United Left (Izquierda Unida) coalition and the pseudo-left parties that orbit around it have played a key role.

The cynicism of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), which leads the United Left, in professing support for the miners is exemplified by its own role in implementing €1.5 billion cuts in the southern region of Andalucía, where it is in coalition with the PSOE. Its

leader, Diego Valderas is vice president.

There are many high-ranking PCE members in the leadership of the CCOO, which the Stalinist party founded in 1976. The policies of the two organizations are virtually indistinguishable. Both call on miners to pressure the government to continue subsidising the mining industry. On June 14, the PCE sent a delegation to the Asturias CCOO to help prepare the one-day general strike planned for June 18, which was deliberately confined to the mining communities.

En Lucha (In Struggle), the Spanish affiliate of the British Socialist Workers Party, uses the strike as an opportunity to boost the CCOO and UGT. An article by Manel Ros states that "the miners are rebelling again as the most militant section of the working class—by the way, almost all members of CCOO and UGT". He glibly identifies the militancy of the miners with the CCOO and UGT.

Ever since the economic crisis erupted in 2008, the union bureaucracy has suppressed working-class resistance to the attacks on living conditions. Recent statistics published by the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations show that the hours lost to labour disputes decreased by 41.7 percent between 2010 and 2011—the years in which Spanish governments imposed austerity measures valued at more than €40 billion.

In another statement, En Lucha declares that "the miners' struggle shows us...that our analysis of the main unions (CCOO and UGT) has to be complex and escape from sectarian simplifications that do not separate the trade union bureaucracy from the combative rank-and-file".

The phrase "sectarian simplifications" is directed at blocking any objective appraisal of the role played by the trade unions. En Lucha insists that for the unions to

function as effective organs of the class struggle it is enough that their members exert pressure on the leadership. This is false; the Spanish unions, both Stalinist and social democratic, like their counterparts around the world, are tied to capitalism and the nation-state. Their primary role today is to help impose the crisis on workers and make sure any opposition does not go beyond the official, harmless channels and challenge the social order.

En Lucha, the Anti-Capitalist Left (IA) of the Pabloite United Secretariat and El Militante, the former Spanish section of the International Marxist Tendency, have all praised the strike as a contemporary expression of a “tradition of struggle” dating back to the 1934 Asturian Commune and the 1962 miners’ strike, a major challenge to General Francisco Franco’s dictatorship.

This is a comparison made without any understanding of the economic and historical changes that have taken place, above all, the ever closer integration of social democracy and the trade unions into the state apparatus, their abandonment of any pretence of fighting for reforms in the interests of the working class in favour of their own enrichment for services rendered as a social and industrial police force.

References to the history of the miners are aimed solely at preventing workers and youth from drawing the necessary conclusions from the many painful experiences in Spain and internationally and striking out on the only viable political road—that of a rebellion against these moribund organisations.

The Anti-Capitalist Left (IA) published an article, “Against the cuts and bailouts: unite the struggles”, describing the strikes by the transport workers held at the same period and in the same region as the miners’ action as a “success...demonstrating that the struggle is useful and the only way to keep the social and labour conquests”.

What does this success amount to? Within days of the strike finishing, the CCOO and UGT had more talks with the employers and negotiated away more “social and labour conquests”—a freeze in pay for this year and salary increases well below inflation to follow. The transport workers were demobilised and prevented from uniting with the miners and other sections of workers under attack.

Ten days later, IA published a “Manifesto Supporting

the Miners Struggle” signed by members of IA, actors, writers, academics, trade union bureaucrats and Olivier Besancenot, former presidential candidate and leader of the IA’s sister party in France, the NPA (New Anticapitalist Party). It described the miners’ strike as “showing us the road”.

The IA deceives its readers by claiming the “struggle is...extending to all sectors and territories”.

The fact is, they are not. There has been no solidarity action of workers in Spain with the miners, or anywhere else in Europe.

El Militante describes how the transport workers called “for unity of action [with the miners], but this was systematically ignored by the leaders of CCOO and UGT”.

Again this does not prevent El Militant from referring to the CCOO and UGT as “class struggle unions” whose only fault is to “underutilise the potential of the working class”.

The miners’ strike is being deliberately isolated and smothered under a blanket of such professed support. The solidarity espoused by the pseudo-left is solidarity with the trade union bureaucracy against the social and political interests of the miners and the entire working class.

It is not a question of reconciling the rank and file with the continued dominance of the union bureaucracy with false phrases, but of mobilizing the rank and file in an insurrectionary movement against the entire apparatus of the unions—and the construction of rank-and-file committees and a genuinely socialist party to lead the Spanish working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact