

The betrayal of Spain's miners strike and the silence of the fake left

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The two main trade unions representing miners in Spain, the CCOO and UGT, have called miners back to work in the regions of Aragon, León and Asturias after 67 days of strike action. They have also called on all those miners who are occupying pits to abandon their protest.

On May 31, more than 8,000 miners went on an indefinite strike against cuts to subsidies that threaten to destroy the industry and 40,000 jobs in mining and related occupations. The unions only called the strike after it was clear that the miners were going to act with or without their sanction.

From the start, the union bureaucracy attempted to strangle the militant movement by confining the struggle to demands on subsidies, knowing full well that the Popular Party (PP) government was not going to back down on the cuts. They then attempted to isolate the miners.

On June 18, a one-day general strike received massive support, but the action was confined by the unions to the mining areas in order to prevent any wider mobilisation against the government's austerity measures that are pauperising tens of millions.

Then on June 22, 200 striking miners organised by the CCOO and UGT went on a 250-mile "Black March". The sole aim of the march was to pressure the PP to honour the previous agreement with the Socialist Party (PSOE) government, which, in line with European Union diktats, had extended subsidies until 2018.

On July 11, the march was welcomed by more than 25,000 people in the streets of Madrid, who then demonstrated together with the strikers. It was a clear sign that the miners had significant working class support despite the isolating efforts of the unions.

After two months of the strike, the unions finally

secured the meeting they wanted with the government, whose position naturally did not change one iota.

The coup de grace then delivered by the unions could not have been more cynical and was anything but merciful. Just two days after the meeting, the unions called off the strike, stating that the miners could not afford to continue.

"We have said to the people to go to the mines starting from tomorrow, we will also announce an agenda of mobilisations", Felipe López, general secretary of the CCOO, announced.

Juan Carlos Álvarez Liébana of the CCOO said ending the strike would allow the miners to "charge their batteries".

The mobilisations López refers to merely mean token protests as the industry is wound down.

The sense of betrayal was manifest. Five of six miners occupying a pit in Santa Cruz del Sil in Leon decided to continue their protest until the company responds to their demands of "no redundancies and no cuts". Commenting on the strike being called off, a spokesman for the miners said, "What is happening is a lack of coherence which did not occur even in [dictator General] Franco's time."

The end of the strike has cleared the way for savage repression against striking miners who had erected barricades across roads, motorways and railways during the strike and resisted the attacks of the Guardia Civil, who used rubber bullets, tear gas, truncheons and beatings. More than 100 strikers are currently being prosecuted. This week, five additional miners were picked up by the Guardia Civil and taken into custody.

During the strike, it fell to the pseudo-left parties such as Izquierda Anticapitalista, En Lucha, El Militante and the Partido Comunista de España to facilitate the unions' betrayal. According to them, the strike was

proof that the unions could function as organisations of class struggle if only sufficient pressure were exerted on the leadership.

En Lucha, the Spanish affiliate of the British Socialist Workers Party, said 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.”

Such claims willfully ignored not only the CCOO and UGT’s failure to stem the ongoing destruction of the mining industry but the strategic experiences made by the Spanish and international working class over the past decades with the trade unions. In the past, the reformist strategies of the unions were based essentially on class collaboration, not class struggle. Even when forced to call strikes and disputes, the aim of the bureaucracy was to ensure a social compact between employers and workers, the rulers and the ruled—one that allowed for national economic regulation which included limited concessions regarding pay, working conditions and welfare measures.

In every country, to preserve its privileged existence, the trade union bureaucracy has responded to the globalisation of production and the opening up of the national economy to far more intense and immediate competition by shifting the axis of its long-established relations with the employers and the state. For several decades now, the unions have actively colluded in the systematic lowering of wages and the destruction of jobs and working conditions. They no longer act even as defensive organisations for workers against the worst excesses of the profit system, but as industrial policemen on behalf of the corporations and the state apparatus.

This process has also seen the lurch to the right of the pseudo-left groups, whose leadership too is made up of a privileged petty bourgeois stratum that has, in particular, secured a position for itself within the trade unions, the apparatus of local and central government and academia.

It is this that accounts for their deafening silence now that the unions have betrayed the miners and forced them back to work. Not one statement or article has been published by En Lucha, El Militante, Izquierda Anticapitalista and the Partido Comunista de España.

According to Izquierda Anticapitalista, the miners’

strike was “showing us the road” and was “extending to all sectors and territories”. What is left of this?

The miners are left in the ditch, whilst the fake-left moves on to next business.

Their actions are similar to a psy-ops unit, whose function, according to the definition of the United States Department of Defence, is “the integrated employment of the core capabilities...to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own.”

Throughout this struggle, the ex-lefts have done everything in their power to influence, disrupt, corrupt and usurp the decision-making of the miners and the rest of the working class on behalf of the trade unions’ apparatus.

Two lessons must be drawn. First, the working class cannot conduct its struggles through the medium of the trade unions. Second, the petty-bourgeois ex-left has again been exposed as a special detachment of the union bureaucracy and must be treated as such.

Since the beginning of the struggle, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned of the role that the unions are playing, insisting that new organisations of working class struggle, such as neighbourhood, factory and workplace committees, independent of the unions, are required and that a new and genuinely socialist party must now be built. This is the fundamental task facing the workers and young people of Spain.



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