

Spanish trade union plays Robin Hood with supermarket raids

Alejandro López
18 August 2012

Last week 200 members of the Andalusian Workers Trade Union (Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores—SAT) entered a supermarket in Écija in the southern province of Seville, filled up nine trolleys with basic necessities such as oil, sugar, rice, pasta, milk, biscuits and vegetables and walked out. The food was then donated to 26 families in La Corrala Utopía (Seville) and food banks in three towns in the province of Cádiz.

A similar action was attempted in Arcos de la Frontera (Cádiz), where another 200 members of SAT attempted to take away 20 trolleys of food. The police stopped them and after four hours of negotiations the mayor of Espera and member of SAT Pedro Romero and representatives of the supermarket agreed to donate 12 trolleys worth of food.

The trade union leader, Juan Manuel Sánchez Gordillo, who is also mayor of Marinaleda and deputy of the Andalusian regional parliament, said he was satisfied with the media attention given to the “symbolical food expropriation” and hoped that “this will serve for some rulers to reflect and realize that there are people that are having a hard time.”

The next day, Sánchez Gordillo moved to Las Turquillas, an estate belonging to the armed forces that was occupied by landless peasant members of SAT two weeks ago, where he demanded that the land be distributed.

Police then arrested seven members of the SAT for their alleged role in the looting of supermarkets. Gordillo has been called to appear in front of a judge.

With millions of workers in dire straits, the protests have naturally won SAT a great deal of sympathy. But they are little more than stunts, executed by forces that have not only failed to genuinely combat the savage assault on workers’ livelihoods, but which have instead

colluded in imposing them.

Sánchez Gordillo is a member of Izquierda Unida, a coalition partner in the regional government of Andalusia which is imposing unprecedented cuts valued at €2.5 billion, and a deputy in parliament representing IU.

Gordillo cast a vote against these cuts as his party wholeheartedly supported these measures, making a threat to resign that has not materialized. Previously he had also come out against a coalition agreement between the Socialist Party (PSOE) and IU and again threatened that he would “leave his seat if an agreement is reached.”

Gordillo fulfils an important political function within IU in giving it a left façade. The *New York Times* notes that “For one hour on television each Saturday, the mayor holds forth on politics or recites his own poetry, his trademark Palestinian scarf draped round his neck. He has rallied the residents around a plethora of causes, from resisting genetically modified crops to supporting the Sahrawi people’s struggle for self-determination in Western Sahara.

“Comparing himself with another, though far more famous, bearded Communist, Mr. Sánchez said that he had been jailed seven times and that he had survived two assassination attempts, one from a fascist agitator and the other from an enraged police officer.”

As mayor of a small town, Marinaleda, he promoted the occupation of the land of large landowners and has developed a “system based on self-builds” of houses, where each person could have a house on the condition that he paid €15 a month and built it himself. But what is described as a “communist oasis” by the radical media in reality depends heavily on money from the regional and central governments. The materials of each house cost the regional government around

€20,000. State largesse is extended to his project only because it is considered to be a useful diversion from a genuine mobilization of the working class against the austerity drive.

The region of Andalusia has been hit especially hard by the measures passed by the current Popular Party and the previous PSOE governments. One and a quarter million people are unemployed, 34 percent of the active population. This percentage reaches 40 percent in the rural areas.

There are more than 3 million poor, with 40 percent of families living below the poverty line. Some 200,000 families have been evicted for not paying their mortgages and 300,000 families are undernourished, according to the Catholic organization Cáritas. Throughout Spain, there are 1.7 million households where all members are unemployed.

The situation is so drastic that in Girona, in Catalonia, the city council has padlocked the bins of supermarkets to prevent people scavenging for food and fights breaking out as people struggle to retrieve the latest bin load of out-of-date stock. These scenes are evident throughout Spain.

In the regions of Catalonia, Valencia and Madrid the governments are going to charge parents a daily fee of up to €3 to send their children to school with packed lunches. Previously, low-income families had depended on grants to pay for school meals, but this has now been eliminated. The fee is supposedly to pay “the cost for the use of the dining room and supervision.”

On the same week these measures were announced, Bloomberg announced that Amancio Ortega, owner of the clothes store Zara, had become the third richest man on earth with a fortune of €38 billion (\$47 billion), increasing his wealth this year by 32 percent. This is equivalent to the average yearly salaries of over 2 million Spaniards.

Gordillo specializes in radical protests at a time when the trade unions are doing absolutely nothing to oppose the government. The latest action by the CCOO and UGT was to meet with King Juan Carlos to discuss the economic crisis and call for a referendum on cuts. In this case, it appears that Robin Hood has already met King John to cut a deal.

On Thursday, Gordillo began a march from Jodar, the town with Andalusia’s highest unemployment rate, to “persuade” other local mayors to skip debt payments,

stop layoffs, cease home evictions and ignore central government demands for budget cuts.

The actions of Gordillo and SAT have been supported by the pseudo left. After their total silence on the recent betrayal of the miners’ strike by the unions, they are now onto their next business.

Izquierda Anticapitalista offers its “total support and solidarity to SAT”. En Lucha “congratulates the action of our peers” and calls for an “active boycott” of the supermarket chain Mercadona. El Militante considers this the start of an “offensive” against the austerity measures of the PP government.

Workers should be warned that Gordillo’s role is to channel social and political discontent into a blind alley. There have been many such figures. One need only recall farmers union and ATTAC leader José Bové, whose various protests secured him a seat in the European Parliament in 2009 for the Greens/European Ecologie. His most recent action was to present a report on the promotion of agricultural goods, focusing on quality products for the high-end consumer.

It is not a Robin Hood figure that is needed at this time, but a new party of and for the working class, working independently of the trade unions for the taking of power. The issue is not the redistribution of a few trolleys of food, but the expropriation of the supermarket owners and the landowners as part of the socialist reorganization of the entire economy.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact