

Spanish telecom strikers: “We have to resist until we achieve something”

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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to striking Spanish Telefónica-Movistar technicians and installers.

José is a telecommunications worker originally from Cadiz, where he was employed by Abentel, a company subcontracted by Telefónica. When he went unpaid for two months, he quit and came to Barcelona in February hoping to find more work. He had been working for another subcontracted company for just over a month when the strike started.

José explained, “The situation is so bad. We work 10 to 12 hours a day with barely enough time to eat. That’s crazy!

“We have to resist until we achieve something. We’re not asking for anything out of this world. There are a lot of people in other industries in the same situation.”

Asked about the role of the large trade unions, which came in some time after the strike started and then signed a deal with Telefónica, José said, “They went to a meeting with Telefónica without consulting anyone from the strike committee. They’re signing a deal with Telefónica independently from the strike. That has nothing to do with us.”

José said that many of the “left” parties and “pro-independence groups”, which had won power in last Sunday’s elections for Barcelona city administration, had expressed their support for the striking workers, but he was sceptical. “They promised us that they would fight alongside us. They said that if the situation doesn’t improve they won’t renew Telefónica’s [public] contracts. That’s what they promised us. Let’s hope they do it. With politicians you never know.”

Javier, of Latin-American origin, was also employed by Telefónica in his home country. He explained, “I’ve been working for them since 1994. Working conditions have been degrading for years. The same model used

for slashing wages in Latin America is being implemented here. This can’t go on. Soon they’ll have us working for free. There comes a moment when one has to take a stand.”

Alberto has been working for Telefónica for about a year. An electrician by trade, he was forced by the 2008 financial crisis to change careers. He was convinced by one of the subcontracting companies to become a “new entrepreneur”—to buy a van, tools, social security insurance with high-risk accident coverage, and become self-employed.

“They start you off with a good salary for the first two months, but then they start to reduce your salary based on performance. I need to work 12 to 14 hours to keep up! Saturdays, Saturday evening, Sundays, Sunday evenings! It’s gotten to a point where it’s been months since I’ve been able to be with my son. And all for €600-€700.

“They send us out to do installations out in the mountains to a lone customer in his chalet that may take all day. All for the same pay [as a job in the city].”

These jobs can be dangerous, he explained: “Fifteen co-workers dead in the past 10 years. And you never hear about them on the news.”

Asked about the unions Alberto said, “It’s always the same story. They sit down to negotiate and it’s ‘red wine or white wine? What’s on the menu today, shrimp or squid?’ That’s what they’re about. There’s no one at CCOO (Comisiones Obreras, Workers’ Commissions) and UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores, General Union of Workers) who knows what our job is like. Find me one! Go to CCOO and look floor by floor to find me someone who understands our job. They don’t know how it is, so how can they negotiate for us? But they underestimate us: society...workers! This isn’t just the revolution of

the ladders [as the movement is called with reference to the hierarchical structure of the subcontracting], this is a workers' revolution. My grandfather died fighting for the eight-hour day and here we are in the 21st century still fighting for the same thing: an eight-hour day, decent pay and two days of rest.”



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