

Spanish unions, Podemos-backed mayor defeat Barcelona Metro strike

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In the last week of February, the 3,200 workers of Barcelona's public Metro system (TMB) went on strike for two non-consecutive days, demanding more job stability and pay rises. An assembly of workers held four days before the strike unanimously rejected the TMB's offer to slowly convert 600 workers' temporary, part-time contracts into permanent ones and a meagre one percent pay rise, after a four-year wage freeze.

As in previous years, the action was timed to coincide with the Barcelona Mobile World Congress (MWC), an event that attracts tens of thousands to the city every year and brings millions of euros to the city's coffers.

From the start, the Metro workers faced threats from the city's Podemos-backed mayor, Ada Colau, a leader of Barcelona en Comú, a coalition including Podemos, the United Left-Greens (ICV) and various community movements. The anarcho-syndicalist General Confederation of Labor (CGT), promoted by various pseudo-left groups as a radical alternative to the social-democratic UGT and Stalinist CCOO unions, capitulated to her demands without a fight.

Once the strike was announced, Colau called on the unions to withdraw the strike threat as a precondition for negotiations, insisting it was not in the "general public interest" and that budgetary constraints meant that the city could not make a better offer.

She then sought to neuter the strike by setting legally-mandated "minimum services" of 50 percent of the normal number Metro trains running during rush hour, and 30 percent for the rest of the day. On the second strike day, Colau then upped the rush-hour minimum to 65 percent and 45 percent in off-peak hours—encouraged by the supine response of the CGT, which had scaled back its demands after the first strike day.

Colau was a leading representative of what Podemos dubbed the "Mayors of Change". Her record exposes claims that the election of Podemos officials to office offers anything to working people.

Various pseudo-left groups have been trying to promote illusions in Colau. The Morenoite organisation Corriente Roja (Red Current) begs, "Ada Colau, now is when you have to fulfill your promises of transparency and social justice".

El Militante, the former Spanish section of the International Marxist Tendency declared, "comrades of Barcelona en Comú, this is not the way ... Colau and Barcelona en Comú have to think over their position in this conflict".

Oscar Blanco from the Pabloite Anticapitalistas, a founding faction within Podemos, claimed in *Viento Sur* that "The same as it happened in Greece with the signing of the third memorandum, the same moral criticisms ("they have sold us out") are proliferating ... However, theories of betrayal do not serve to explain anything and what we must try to understand are correlations of forces and the strategic hypothesis."

What is the "strategic hypothesis"? Blanco answers us explaining that the main "challenge is to exploit these tensions [between workers and governments] creatively, prompting "municipalities of change" beyond the constraints under which they are attached."

What is plainly evident is that Podemos and its forces, if they are given the opportunity, will attack the working class every bit as harshly as did the Syriza government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras in Greece.

The protestations of Corriente Roja, El Militante and Anticapitalistas are the height of cynicism and hypocrisy. Colau is a bourgeois politician who protects the interests of the ruling elite. Her reactionary role in

the Metro strike exposes all these organizations, who claimed she represented an alternative and assisted her rise.

Colau made her name as the spokesperson for the anti-evictions movement, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), which developed after the collapse of Spain's housing boom and the mass evictions that followed of those unable to pay their mortgages. The PAH channelled social anger behind a petition, the Legislative Initiative for Decent Housing (ILP) to pressure the right-wing Popular Party (PP) government to change eviction legislation.

Following the failure of the petition in 2013 the WSWs warned that it was "...proof of the bankruptcy of the perspective of pressure politics pursued by organisations like the PAH, which became the next port of call for many of the leaders of the Indignados (15M) and Democracia Real Ya! The no-politics perspective they imposed on these movements was responsible for their collapse, and they perpetrated a similar exercise on the budding anti-evictions movement. Colau, a veteran of the G8 protest movement, insisted the PAH was as "an independent, apolitical and plural" organisation."

Colau then helped create Barcelona en Comú and was adopted by Podemos in its attempts to get elected in last May's local elections. One of Colau's first actions was to extend the MWC contract. She made no mention of the weeks-long strike by Telefónica agency workers and renewed Catalan government contracts with the mobile operator.

Colau has since joined forces with Yanis Varoufakis, who played a key role as Finance Minister within the Syriza government in imposing the brutal austerity measures on the Greek population. The Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25) he leads peddles illusions in the EU, claiming it aims to democratize and humanize the EU institutions.

Colau's role has been recognized by the ruling elite. Both the pro-PSOE *El Pais* and the right-wing *El Español* published fawning articles recently titled "The Unstoppable Rise of Ada Colau". They said she plays a "central part" in Podemos and predict she will become president of Catalonia.

Colau's unstoppable rise has a broader significance. It vividly illustrates what workers in Spain would face should a "left government" involving Podemos comes

to power over the next few weeks. Since December's elections Spain attempts to form a new administration have collapsed and Podemos has been calling for a "Government of Change" led by the Socialist Party (PSOE) that includes itself, the IU and smaller nationalist parties. Such a government, like the Syriza government in Greece, would only carry out more attacks against the workers.



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