

Barcelona airport security workers defy strike-breaking by paramilitary police

Alejandro Lopez
14 August 2017

After three weeks of struggle between the security staff at Barcelona's El Prat airport and the private contractor Eulen, and ahead of an indefinite strike slated to begin today, the Popular Party (PP) government has sent the Guardia Civil paramilitary police to break the strike.

Yesterday, the security workers voted to reject demands from the regional Generalitat government to end the strike and decided to continue the walkout despite the threat from the Guardia Civil.

Last Thursday, the Spanish government said it would "take all necessary measures" to guarantee "security and public order" at El Prat. On Friday, Public Works Minister Íñigo de la Serna announced that the government would be sending the Guardia Civil to El Prat to man the security scanners. The minister reproached the workers for being "inflexible," saying they had shown "zero willingness to reach an agreement." De la Serna added that it was necessary to deploy the Guardia Civil because Spain was on terror alert level four (on an ascending scale of one to five).

After the announcement of the vote to continue the strike, de la Serna said he would "immediately" send the strike to binding arbitration. A law of dubious constitutionality passed in 1977, the final year of the fascist regime established by Generalissimo Francisco Franco, allows the government to take all necessary measures to crush any strike action that continues in opposition to the results of arbitration.

After the vote, workers stressed that they had a right to strike, as guaranteed under the 1978 Constitution. Purificación Infante, a member of the strike committee, said, "I see now that they are working very hard to crush a strike, which is a constitutional right we have."

Spain's PP government, like its European counterparts, is using laws passed under the pretext of

preventing terror attacks to suppress workers' struggles, setting the stage for wider attacks on democratic rights. This is only the latest incidence of armed units being deployed against strikes and protests in Europe, the most prominent being the massive mobilization of French riot police last year against youth and workers protesting the Socialist Party government's unpopular labor law.

The 350 Eulen security guards in Barcelona, who operate scanners, control queues and search passengers, are striking against poverty-level wages and poor working conditions.

They blame AENA, the 51 percent state-owned airport management firm, for awarding a €23 million airport security contract a year ago to Eulen, the lowest bidder for the contract. Last year, Eulen had profits of €14 million, 65 percent higher than the year before. The families of Nuñez Feijoo, the current premier of the region of Galicia, and former Interior Minister Mayor Oreja, both of the PP, are controlling shareholders in Eulen, which has contract awards at 27 airports.

Under the previous contractor in Barcelona, Prosegur, employees earned some €1,300 a month. With Eulen, workers transferred from Prosegur make €1,100, while new workers earn only €800 or €900. Employees are forced to work overtime for €8 an hour to make up the difference, sometimes working up to 16 hours straight.

In addition to demanding better wages, workers are calling for a further 50 security staff to be hired.

Last week, workers rejected Eulen's offer to hire at most 21 new employees and increase wages by €155 a month. They also rejected the Catalan regional government's arbitration proposal of an increase of €200 a month, voting instead by a large majority to support their own proposal of €250.

If the unpopular minority PP government sends in the

Guardia Civil, it will be because it has been emboldened by the role of the unions, Catalan separatists and pseudo-left forces. The unions are isolating and wearing down strikes in the sector, under conditions where strike calls are spreading to other airports, including Madrid and Galicia.

The CCOO (Workers' Commissions), UGT (General Union of Workers) and USO (Union of Workers' Syndicates) have sent a letter to AENA threatening to call strikes if they don't receive a response to their demands. However, to make sure that this does not affect the profitability of the airports and the tourism sector, they have called for strike action at the beginning of the low tourist season and on different days. According to their strike notice, their intention is call strike action on September 15, 17, 22, 24 and September 29; October 1, 6, 11, 15, 27, 30 and 31; November 3 and 5; and December 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30.

The Catalan nationalists claim that an independent Catalonia would increase living standards in the region. They aim to hold a referendum on independence on October 1, which the PP has sworn to stop "by any means." They joined Madrid in attacking the striking workers.

The regional government has offered the national government use of the Catalan regional police, the Mossos d'Esquadra, to help the Guardia Civil break the strike.

Jordi Turull, the regional government's spokesperson, said that the Guardia Civil "surely will do more work at the airport, at the service of citizens, than looking for or chasing ballot boxes"—a reference to Madrid's threat to use the Guardia Civil to stop the secessionist referendum. Turull also attacked workers for not compromising, threatening that "if you want everything, you end up losing everything."

Gabriel Rufián, the spokesman in the Spanish parliament for the separatist ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia), tweeted: "It is bad luck that the security company of the sister of Nuñez Feijoo works at 27 airports and goes on strike only in Barcelona," suggesting that the PP is using the strike as an attack on Catalonia.

Barcelona's Podemos-backed mayor, Ada Colau, has come out in defence of Guardia Civil strike-breaking on the grounds that "they are not substituting workers, and

right now what we need is to guarantee security above anything else."

Colau's reactionary role in the strike exposes Podemos' anti-working class character and the bankruptcy of all those who claimed that Podemos represented an alternative to the Spanish Socialist Party and who assisted in the rise of Podemos and Colau. The mayor illustrates what workers in Spain would face should a "left" government involving Podemos come to power.

In last year's metro strike, Colau called on the unions to withdraw the strike threat as a precondition for talks, insisting a strike was not in the "general public interest" and that budgetary constraints meant the city could not make a better offer. The so-called "mayor of change" also used city police to target for dispersal, arrest and deportation migrant workers who earn a living by street vending.

Workers and youth must defend the Barcelona security workers, oppose strike-breaking by the armed forces, and prepare to mobilize in a broader political struggle against the Catalan authorities and the PP government in Madrid.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact