

Spain: Mounting anger among Amazon workers exposes “victory” claims following March strike

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Amazon workers at San Fernando warehouse in Spain’s capital, Madrid, are calling for renewed strike action and protests against the company’s attack on wages and conditions.

The call emerges just weeks after roughly 98 percent of the plant’s 2,000 workers went on a 48-hour strike in late March.

Amazon was unmoved by the unprecedented display of solidarity and militancy amongst the San Fernando workers and imposed a new “agreement” on April 1 in which workers are set to lose €2,000 to €4,500 annually and see their wages frozen indefinitely.

Rosa García, representative on the works council for the Socialist Party (PSOE)-aligned General Workers Union (UGT), complained about the company’s action: “It was the harshest response they could have opted for, and they did it at night, warning at the last minute, when it came into effect on Sunday, they have completely gone from sitting with us and negotiating...all the points we rejected have been implemented.”

Amazon took revenge on the 900 temporary workers in the warehouse. According to the union CSIT, “80 percent of temporary contracts that ended after the strike days have not been renewed.”

The company has also imposed massive productivity hikes under maximum supervision to compensate for the hours lost during the strike. Workers told *El Español*, “If productivity was an obsession before, it has now become an obligation. They are really tightening the screws.”

It is critical for workers to understand and consciously assimilate the lessons of the strike, including the role of the trade unions, which sought to

prevent it from developing into a broader political mobilisation of the entire working class...and then to cover for their betrayal by trumpeting the return to work as a victory.

The Stalinist-led CCOO said the strike had been a “complete success.” The UGT’s García declared, “We are very, very happy.” The anarcho-syndicalist CGT proclaimed it a “complete victory.”

A key auxiliary role was played by the pseudo-left groups such as Revolutionary Left (Izquierda Revolucionaria), Class Struggle (Lucha de Clases) and the Morenoite Workers’ Revolutionary Current (Corriente Revolucionaria de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras), which posted articles uncritically defending the unions’ strike calls. They glorified the workers’ militancy as if this were enough to stop the multibillion-dollar global corporation, which is notorious for the super-exploitation of its workforce.

From the start, the unions, with the full support of the pseudo-left groups, ensured the strike remained isolated. Amazon could then minimise the impact by diverting orders to logistics centres in Barcelona and France. This did not come as a surprise. Even before the strike, Marc Blanes, leader of the CGT union in the warehouse told *eldiario.es*, “Amazon has an almost strike-breaking logistic network, with 46 centres in Europe.”

During 17 months of negotiations with the company since the collective agreement expired, the unions did not even try to coordinate actions with Amazon strikes in Europe. Instead, when strikes erupted at distribution centres in Germany, France and Italy on last year’s Black Friday, the Spanish unions not only refused to call out their members but also played the role of

strikebreakers.

Now, these same political forces are conspiring against mounting anger of workers and renewed calls for strike action in the aftermath of Amazon's attack on conditions and wages. The unions have organised a series of protests to let off steam—in front of the warehouse and near the headquarters of ETT Adecco and Manpower, two temporary work agencies, for being “accomplices of misinformation and co-responsible for the non-renewal of several colleagues.”

On April 20, they have called for another strike in front of Amazon's new corporate office in Madrid.

The CGT is considering the possibility of striking on Amazon's July 12 “Prime Day” of exclusive offers—a one-day strike in three months, another manoeuvre which is not aimed at uniting workers to fight the company, but to release tension and facilitate the implementation of the corporation's policies. Even this fraudulent move is only “under discussion,” with a CGT spokesman telling RTVE, “People want to go on strike today.”

The CCOO's representative at the warehouse, Douglas Harper, suggested an “indefinite strike” if “no progress occurs”, only to add in the next breath that this type of strike “is the last resort.”

El Confidencial revealed that other unnamed unions had already rejected an “indefinite strike,” claiming, “Here salaries are very tight, we are not a group that receives a salary that allows us to stop indefinitely. ... Of course, the possibility of new strikes is very much alive: the more repression there is, the more the environment will heat up.”

Such comments in the aftermath of such a defeat expose the unions as key accomplices of Amazon in the company's global strategy to cut costs through sweatshop conditions involving speed-ups, total surveillance, back-breaking quotas, and minimal toilet and meal breaks.

The unions have no interest in calling for an indefinite strike and appealing to Amazon workers in Spain and Europe precisely because they fear such a confrontation will win broad popular support. They are aware that such actions are explosive and threaten their corporatist “partnerships” with capitalist enterprises and their own comfortable lifestyles.

The betrayal at Amazon takes place in the context of an upward trend of workers' struggles across Europe,

which finds expression in Spain in the action taken by subway workers in Malaga, by tramworkers in Madrid and Zaragoza, and in the dairy sector and among teachers.

According to the latest data by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, the number of strikes is increasing. In 2017, the number of days lost was double that of 2016 and involved 729 work stoppages with 225,687 strikers. In January and February 2018, the hours lost by strikes increased by another 48 percent compared to 2017.

Another significant development is the number of days lost that are defined as “not strictly labour-related.” In 2017, these made up 2,530,081 days, most of which were in Catalonia on October 3 and November 8 and involved protests against the Spanish government's repression of the Catalan separatists.

This year has already seen major strikes by metal and auto workers in Germany, Turkey, and eastern Europe; railway workers in Britain; and broad layers of teachers in Britain and the United States. In France, a massive confrontation is taking place between the working class and the government's decree privatising the French national railways (SNCF).

Amazon workers must unite against corporate exploitation by constructing committees in their workplaces to defend their rights. These committees must link with workers at other warehouses in the Europe and internationally in a common struggle against Amazon. To learn more, sign up for the International Amazon Workers Voice newsletter and like us on Facebook.



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