

Police beat up Amazon strikers in Spain

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Police charged a picket line and beat Amazon workers during the second day of a three-day strike at the company's largest logistics centre in Spain at San Fernando de Henares, Madrid.

The strike was timed to coincide with Amazon's "Prime Day," and took place as thousands of workers in Germany and Poland also struck the company.

Until the police attack, the Amazon workers and their supporters had been peacefully picketing, under the broiling sun at the main entrance to "MAD4," as police escorted trucks and scabs into the centre. According to strikers, the police "without apparent reason," beat them up with truncheons, which led to one suffering "an open wound on the face caused by a blow from a policeman." Three others were arrested and taken away to police stations.

Ana told the *World Socialist Web Site* that she had come to the assistance of a fellow worker who had been corralled by the police but found herself being "clubbed three of four times" resulting in "contusions on her arm and backside."

The Amazon workers have been involved in a long running dispute, since 2016. For nearly two years, Amazon has been negotiating with the trade unions—CGT, CCOO, UGT and CSIT—to impose the Provincial Collective Agreement of Logistics and Packing of the Madrid Region, which would replace the previous warehouse agreement and drastically reduce workers' rights.

In March, they went on a 48-hour strike supported by 75 percent of the workforce that followed similar action by Amazon workers in Italy, Germany and France during November's Black Friday sales. However, the company, buoyed by the collaboration of the unions, unilaterally imposed new terms and conditions that meant:

- Lower wage increases, with wages falling below the inflation rate

- No more pay increases based on seniority
- A 25 percent reduction in sick pay
- A two-tier wage system, with new hires earning €3,000-5,000 less than current inventory workers
- Cuts to overtime for working "extraordinary hours," including holiday and night shifts

Another worker in her fifties, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals, told the WSWS that Amazon has gone further, paying new hires on the 18th day of employment instead of the usual fourth day. She believes that Amazon could "very well close up the San Fernando facility and go elsewhere." She criticised the unions, saying they each sought to defend their own "brand" and that the struggle was being undermined by the lack of unity. She had previously supported the Communist Party aligned CCOO (Comisiones Obreras), but now backed the anarcho-sindicalist CGT.

The CGT poses as a radical alternative to the discredited CCOO and PSOE-aligned UGT.

Amazon's onslaught is based on a European-wide and global strategy of offering cut-price goods delivered through sweatshop conditions involving relentless speed-ups, total surveillance, back-breaking quotas, and minimal toilet and meal breaks. The CGT has no perspective to defeat it.

CGT member José, who is a member of the Company Committee, complained, "We are suffering from police repression, they are preventing us from reporting, we have been denounced. ... Once again we see how the powerful are backed up with the laws and the forces of the state."

Another CGT official complained that "the company wants to negotiate on the current agreement and not on what we already had, that we recognize as lawful."

In contrast to the unions, the company has long prepared for this week's strike. Fred Padje, operations director of Amazon Spain and Italy, warned before the March strike, "We work with a network of 46 centres

throughout the continent and with that we can cover the demand throughout Europe.” He boasted how they had managed to deactivate the protest at one of the company’s facilities in northern Italy during last year’s last Black Friday sale in what is popularly called ‘logistical plumbing’—by increasing the workload at the company’s plant in Barcelona.

The same has been happening during this week’s strike, with Amazon workers continuing to work at the distribution centre in Alcobendas, just half an hour’s drive north-west from San Fernando de Henares and at Getafe, half an hour to the south-west. Reports suggest that in the four weeks before the strike, the company took on up to 350 new temporary hires.

In a sign that the strikes are being wound down, union officials admitted to the media that they are putting the issue of the scab labour in the hands of their lawyers, claiming it contravenes section 6.5 of Royal Decree Labor Relations which states that “during the course of the strike, the employer cannot replace strikers by workers who did not belong to the company when it was announced.”

Many workers mentioned that the police were more aggressive in clearing the entrance to the Amazon site and that in the previous strike in March they allowed people to come closer. It is an indication that Amazon asked for and got closer cooperation from the Spanish government and police.

The police violence was also a sign of pressure from higher-ups to crack down on the pickets and tilt the media narrative against the workers.

This takes place under a new Socialist Party (PSOE) government installed in June with the help of the pseudo-left Podemos party and regional nationalists. It is inconceivable that the police action in such a high-profile dispute involving a company that dominates the country’s e-commerce market, worth an estimated €22 billion annually, was not closely coordinated with the Interior Ministry under Fernando Grande-Marlaska. It was the government delegate in the Community of Madrid, the PSOE’s José Manuel Rodríguez Uribes, who sent them in.

The attack on the Amazon workers is a warning to Spanish workers and youth that the PSOE will attempt to stamp out any opposition to the austerity and militarist policies it is intent on imposing.

To cover up Podemos’ complicity, two Unidos

Podemos deputies, Alberto Rodriguez and Ana Marcello, were dispatched to the Coslada Police Station to show their support for those detained and demand their release. The Parliamentary Group of Podemos in the Assembly of Madrid pleaded with the PSOE government on Tuesday to intervene, so that the detainees are released “immediately.”

Workers from San Fernando de Henares, or any other Amazon warehouse, cannot defeat transnational corporations like Amazon without a unified international fight. If Padje can boast of the company’s strike-breaking preparations, this is due to the role of the unions who act as facilitators for the exploitation imposed by Amazon. During months of negotiations with the company, they have refused to coordinate actions with Amazon strikes down the road, let alone in the rest of Europe.

The role being played by the anarcho-syndicalist CGT is further proof that workers need new organisations—rank-and-file workplace committees, independent of the unions, that they control democratically. The CGT, the third-largest union and promoted by various pseudo-left groups as a radical alternative to the social-democratic UGT and Stalinist CCOO unions, supports the same nationalist divisions as its counterparts and capitulate as quickly as their competitors.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections internationally have established the International Amazon Workers Voice as a platform of opposition, aimed at developing independent workplace committees that can link workers in each plant with their brothers and sisters in a worldwide fight against exploitation and for social equality.



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