

# Unions call off general strike in Catalonia

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A public sector strike in Catalonia, Spain, involving 250,000 workers called for December 12 was suspended by the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and General Union of Workers (UGT) trade unions, less than 24 hours before it was due to begin.

Union leaders made clear they called off the strike because of the political and social crisis in Spain, Catalonia in particular, which threatens the continued rule of the minority Socialist Party (PSOE) government led by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

The public sector coordinator for the CCOO in Catalonia, Joan Maria Sentís, declared that he was “satisfied” with a new deal while claiming that “if the country was in a normal situation we would not have signed.” The UGT is aligned to the PSOE and the CCOO is aligned with the Stalinist United Left, which is in the Unidos Podemos alliance that helped bring the PSOE to power in June.

The strike's main demand was the payment of a part of workers' salaries called “paga extra” from 2013 and 2014, which was withheld during the austerity drive of the Popular Party (PP) government of Mariano Rajoy. The misnamed “paga extra” (extraordinary pay) comes in the form of an additional payment to a worker's monthly wage in the months of June and December, but in reality constitutes one seventh of their annual salary.

The Catalan government—a nationalist coalition of the Republican Left (ERC) and Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT)—is the only regional government that has not yet paid workers a single euro of the salaries taken from them.

The strike was called in November by the Catalan branches of the main Spanish trade unions after negotiations with the regional government failed. At the time, the unions rejected the government's final offer of paying the workers over a period of eight years from 2019 to 2026, saying it was “insulting.” They have now called off the strike after the government

agreed to pay the money in four years, ending in 2022. The deal also includes a clause about the “urgent” character of the payments, meaning that they are to take priority over other public sector spending. In other words, the unions are permitting the Catalan government to recoup the cost of the new payment plan by cuts in public spending in other areas.

The CCOO and UGT had already delayed the December 12 strike to prevent joint action with the November strikes called by the anarcho-syndicalist General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the Labour Union Coordinator (COS) and other smaller and sector-specific unions. The CCOO and UGT deliberately isolated the “paga extra” strikes, arguing that they did not want to associate global public sector workers' demands with those of specific sectors.

The November strikes saw the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of workers and students in Catalonia, demanding a reversal to the budget cuts imposed by regional nationalist governments since the beginning of the 2008 financial crisis.

The union bureaucracy is determined to control and demobilise this renewed working-class militancy. While they have had some success—the number of strikes from January to October was down by 25 percent in terms of hours lost compared to the same period in 2017—the month of November has seen a sharp upswing in the number of strikes—up by 54 percent compared to November 2017.

The betrayal of the December 12 general strike takes place in the context of a massive mobilization of the working class in neighbouring France, in the form of the “Yellow Vest” protests, which are challenging the government of President Emmanuel Macron. The Spanish ruling elites and their associates in the trade unions are terrified of these developments spreading across the border and are developing their anti-democratic police-state measures of rule.

The PSOE and its Unidos Podemos appendage are following suit. At present the Catalan nationalists are refusing to support the 2019 budget crafted by Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias and Sánchez. They hold the casting votes to get the budget passed, but have so far refused after state attorneys confirmed sedition charges against nine imprisoned Catalan leaders for their role in declaring independence last year and who are currently on hunger strike.

On Wednesday, Sánchez launched a right-wing tirade against the Catalan nationalists in the Madrid Congress accusing them of a narrative of “lies and grievances” that, like Brexit in the UK, was splitting the nation and “undermining the European common project.” He warned that it was “unacceptable” for current Catalan regional premier, Quim Torra, to declare that the “road to freedom” lay in the “Slovenian path”—the unilateral declaration of independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 that provoked civil war, facilitated by the imperialist powers who then intervened militarily, ending in the disintegration of the country into rival ethnically-based mini states.

Sánchez declared, “I will not accept a new violation of the Constitution in Catalonia” in reference to the declaration of independence, which saw Rajoy suspend regional powers under Article 155 of the Constitution and impose direct rule from Madrid. Sánchez said that he would act immediately if there was another “omission of responsibilities” on the part of Catalan political leaders pointing to the failure of the regional Mossos d’Esquadra police force to intervene last weekend when pro-independence Committees to Defend the Republic (CDR) blocked motorways in support of the jailed leaders. He warned that he would not hesitate to dispatch national police officers to the region to maintain public order.

The police state measures Sánchez is threatening is, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned would happen, an escalated lurch to the right by the PSOE following the December 2 election in the region of Andalusia. The result expressed a further fracturing of the bipartisan political system created during the transition to parliamentary democracy following the death of dictator Generalísimo Francisco Franco in 1975. Support for the PSOE slumped, ending its 36 years of uninterrupted rule, while the record abstention rate also indicated widespread opposition to all the official

parties. The Unidos Podemos front—Adelanta Andalucía—lost three seats and 200,000 votes.

The electoral beneficiaries were the parties of the “new right,” Citizens and the fascist Vox, which were able to exploit the demobilising by the PSOE and its political ally Podemos of the widespread opposition in the working class to the Rajoy government and its agenda of austerity, political repression and militarism—above all during last year’s Catalan independence crisis in Catalonia. In the election’s aftermath, Podemos called for an anti-fascist alliance with the PSOE. Within days the PSOE was busy adopting the policies of Vox in Catalonia.

Workers in Spain can fight against the attacks on their standard of living only by rebelling against the pro-capitalist unions that sell out their struggles. Catalan workers need to link up with their brothers and sisters in the rest of Spain, French workers fighting the Macron government and all workers throughout Europe.



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