Trade unions, Podemos and CaixaBank collaborate to cut 8,000 jobs

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CaixaBank, Spain's largest domestic retail bank, is working closely with the trade unions and the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government to axe 8,291 jobs. Yesterday, it reduced the cuts to 7,791 jobs. This is still the biggest ever staff reduction in the Spanish banking sector, however.

Last week, management informed the trade unions, the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) and social-democratic General Union of Labor (UGT), of plans to slash staff from 44,000 to 36,109. Over 1,500 branches will be closed.

This is the result of the merger last September between La Caixa and bailed-out Bankia, backed by the PSOE-Podemos government, the Bank of Spain and the European Central Bank. The merged bank holds around €650 billion in assets.

In 2012, Bankia was bailed out with €22.5 billion. Nine years later, barely €3.3 billion has been recovered. It is not expected that the new merger will mean that this money will ever be returned.

The savage attack on workers was widely anticipated, with reports of 6,000 to 10,000 redundancies. The CCOO and UGT did not mobilise the workforce but, instead, made clear from the start their willingness to accept job losses.

Last September, Unai Sordo, general secretary of the CCOO, said the merger "has a fairly strong business logic and, if confirmed, has an important strategic scope because we are talking about a financial entity with significant stakes in other energy, communication and infrastructure companies." He continued, "Whenever there is a merger this has some kind of effect on labour relations and on the number of staff," pledging to ensure there are no "traumatic" redundancies.

UGT representative Daniel Esteban said the UGT's aim was "to minimize the destruction of employment."

In the next six months, the trade unions did nothing publicly, but behind the scenes made clear their support for job cuts. *El Español* wrote, "A trade union source present at the CaixaBank redundancy scheme negotiating table explained to this newspaper that its calculations estimated a 5,000 surplus of the workforce after the integration of Bankia."

Now, the unions are cynically stating they were surprised about the announcement. UGT general secretary Pepe Álvarez said that the redundancies are "evident proof of lack of sensitivity." He added, "we indebted the country as a whole so that today the financial sector can be alive."

The truth is, the ruling class, in collaboration with the trade unions, bailed itself out with billions from tax payers' money to be paid for by social attacks on the working class.

The CCOO's Sordo called the Caixa-Bank redundancy measures "an obscenity," especially "after the austerity policies were imposed in Spain in exchange for the bailout of the bank." Calling it "a shame," Sordo continued: "We demand co-responsibility from the financial sector and it is not having a co-responsible attitude when it comes to approaching its modernization process."

Just two days later, another bank, BBVA, announced plans to lay off 3,800 workers, or 16 percent of the workforce, and shut 530 branches. Once again, the CCOO pretended to be surprised, calling the plan "indefensible and scandalous."

Overall, the Spanish banking sector could slash as many as 15,000 jobs this year. Since 2008, it has lost nearly 120,000 workers (35 percent of the total) and closed 20,000 branches, according to the Bank of Spain. Over the same period, it reaped €200 billion in profits.

The union bureaucracies have no intention to wage a struggle. Closely tied to the capitalist state and the corporations, they barely attempt to pose as defenders of

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the workers they supposedly represent. Instead, they act as the labour police, suppressing struggles, imposing job cuts and social retrogression on the workers in the interests of privileged bureaucracies. They cannot be pressured to pursue policies favourable to workers' interests, any more than one can pressure the Spanish Federation of Employers Organisations for a pro-workers policy.

The CCOO and UGT act as co-implementers of CaixaBank's redundancy plans. The same can be said of the other dozens of redundancy schemes being implemented throughout Spain, affecting nearly 30,000 workers in all major industrial sectors. In the past six years, over 250,000 workers have lost their jobs under these schemes.

The trade unions play a despicable role in these redundancy schemes. Part of the redundancy money goes straight into union coffers as commissions per worker made redundant, in most cases without the worker's knowledge. Trade unions can gain up to 10 percent for each worker dismissed. In addition, workers in redundancy schemes pay a fixed amount, ranging from €100 to €400, for the union's legal advisory services. This helps to explain these schemes' popularity with the union bureaucracies and big business over the past decade.

During the pandemic, the trade unions have also co-implemented the ruling class policy of "herd immunity" and massive handouts to the rich. They supported back-to-work and back-to-school policies responsible for millions of COVID-19 infections and tens of thousands of deaths. Spain has now an excess death rate of over 100,000 and 3.4 million infections.

As to the bailout expected to distribute €140 billion of EU funds to the corporations and banks, the CCOO and UGT sit in the funds advisory committee overseeing how the money is handed out. When this package was announced, both unions claimed they were not tied to austerity. In the past weeks, the PSOE-Podemos government has announced major pension reforms to raise the retirement age, while at the same time implementing another labour reform, the fourth in a decade, aimed at attacking workers' rights and conditions.

As for Podemos, like the unions, they were aware of CaixaBank's job destruction in advance. They issued toothless criticisms, while making clear they will not mobilise workers against this.

Podemos fraudulently claims the PSOE did this without consulting them. Its regional branch in Andalusia claimed the bank merger was done "thanks to PSOE support in the Government, without asking for the opinion of Podemos."

On Twitter, Podemos' economic chief, Nacho Alvarez, impotently appealed to the PSOE to use its 16 percent minority holding in CaixaBank shares to stop the redundancies, writing: "Podemos said that the merger of Bankia and CaixaBank was worrying news and, unfortunately, time has confirmed us. The state must use its participation in the entity to defend employment and the public interest." Álverez did not call workers to protest, let alone strike.

The treachery of the unions and the "Left Populist" Podemos party reflect the fact that both these forces speak, not for the working class, but for affluent sections of the middle class, indifferent and hostile to the interests of workers.

For the working class to fight back, workers must create new organs to coordinate its struggles in different factories, industries and countries in opposition to the ruling class and the corporatist trade unions. For this purpose, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the WSWS and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties are calling for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The development of a network of workers committees is absolutely essential. But this must be based on a socialist programme and principles. This can only be fought for by the development of a revolutionary party in the working class, opposed to the petty-bourgeois parties like Podemos. We urge readers and sympathisers to register and join the ICFI's Online May Day Rally to find out more about the IWA-RFC. It will be streamed live at wsws.org/mayday.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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