

Spanish unions strangle Cádiz metalworkers' strike

Alex Lantier**25 November 2021**

Yesterday, union bureaucracies affiliated to Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE) and Podemos coalition government reached an agreement with the Federation of Metal Companies of Cádiz (FEMCA). After signing it, the social-democratic General Union of Labor (UGT) and the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) unions announced that they were calling off the strike.

This is a blatant attempt to sell out a powerful, week-long strike by 22,000 metalworkers. Strikers occupied their workplaces and defeated attempts by the PSOE-Podemos government's riot police to retake the factories. Now, however, the government is trying to achieve through trade union treachery what it could not obtain by police violence.

Neither of the strike's main demands have been met. Firstly, according to the *Diario de Cádiz*, the unions have "agreed to the closure of the Airbus plant in Puerto Real." Secondly, workers had been striking against FEMCA's proposal for a 0.9 percent wage increase, opposing any loss in purchasing power even as inflation surges to 6 percent. However, far from agreeing to a raise of more than 6 percent, the UGT and CCOO unions agreed with FEMCA a 2 percent wage increase.

FEMCA, the UGT and CCOO tried to fob off the workers with empty assurances that 80 percent of the resulting loss in purchasing power will be made up by 2024. They also announced the formation of a joint committee with representatives from FEMCA management and the unions to supposedly implement this agreement and ensure it is respected.

Such assurances are not worth the paper they are printed on. For the last 10 days, the PSOE-Podemos government has sent police squads to fire pepper spray, tear gas and rubber bullets at strikers, even deploying armored cars in the streets of Cádiz to terrorize the public. The government and its affiliated unions will stop at nothing to slash wages and jobs.

The strike must be defended against Podemos, the CCOO and the UGT. This requires the building of independent, rank-and-file committees among strikers and in workplaces across the Cádiz region, in a political struggle against

Podemos and in opposition to the unions. Strikers can appeal to broad support among other workers and to growing opposition in the European working class to the policies of social austerity and mass infection with COVID-19 pursued by governments across the continent. Protests in support of Cádiz strikers have already taken place across the southern Spanish region of Andalusia, including in Seville and Huelva.

Podemos and the unions are leading the campaign for a sell-out. Deputy Prime Minister and Labor Minister Yolanda Díaz, also the general secretary of Podemos, hailed the deal as an advance for workers. "Mobilization and social dialog are the basis for winning rights for workers," she declared, adding, "this contract must be a step forward for the future of the Bay of Cádiz." The PSOE-Podemos regional representative in Madrid also banned a solidarity protest for the Cádiz strike which was due to take place today.

The media and the unions are claiming that union delegates and workers voted massively for the sell-out. Reporting a "return to normal in industry," the *Diario de Cádiz* wrote that the contract "has been ratified by assemblies of trade union delegates and workers in their workplaces." It cited regional UGT secretary Antonio Montoro: "The result of the vote is overwhelming. The calling off of the strike was approved by an absolute majority."

Montoro's claim that there is "overwhelming" support for a sell-out is directly contradicted by reports that are spreading rapidly on social media, showing that the vote was falsified by the union bureaucracy, or simply not carried out at all.

One widely cited tweet denounces union sabotage at the PINE electronics firm. "The trade unions forced people to vote and then to work, and then they falsified the vote totals. At the firm at Puerto Real, they falsified the vote report. The committee affirmed that the contract had been agreed, but in fact the majority of workers voted against it. Here is the vote report," it declares, with a picture of a voting sheet showing 29 votes for, 178 against and 5 abstentions.

Temp agency workers—who can account for up to 75 percent of staff in Cádiz plants—were reportedly not allowed to vote, as technically they are not hired by the company or represented by the unions. One tweet said: “Many temps could not vote, their opinion was totally left aside even though the contract affects them, and they were in the front line of the struggle.”

Videos circulated on social media of metalworkers protesting at the CCOO headquarters in Cádiz.

The minority anarchist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union issued a statement opposing the UGT-CCOO accord, but proposing nothing besides impotently continuing the strike just one more day. On the accord, it declares: “By this action, taken behind the backs of the workers, it is planned to cancel the indefinite strike in the Cádiz metal sector that has been ongoing since November 19. The CGT therefore proposes to continue the strike on November 25 and 26, because a lot is at stake in Cádiz.”

Cádiz mayor José María (“Kichi”) Gonzalez, from the Pabloite Anticapitalistas party allied to Podemos, cynically declined to endorse the sell-out but still demanded that it be imposed.

He told *Andalucía Información*: “I will not promote the accord as it does not correspond to me but, only and exclusively, to the workers. Obviously it is not my accord, I would have preferred another, better, more just and more necessary, for the situation of temp workers, ending temp work and without a loss of purchasing power for those who give it their all every day. But it is what was agreed, and so not only will I agree to it, I will be the first to demand that it be put into practice...”

The treachery of the unions and Podemos exposes their hostility to the working class, and vindicates the International Committee of the Fourth International’s (ICFI) principled opposition to the “left populist” Podemos party since its foundation in 2014. It is a party of the affluent middle class, based in academia, the state machine and the union bureaucracy, and opposed to the workers. Its Greek ally, Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”), imposed billions of euros in social cuts and set up concentration camps for refugees while in power in 2015–2019.

Podemos has been in government since 2019, imposing the European Union’s (EU) policies of mass infection during the pandemic. In this period, over 1.3 million people died across Europe and, according to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, over 100,000 Spaniards died of COVID-19. Moreover, the EU handed out trillions of euros in bank and corporate bailouts, leading the wealth of Europe’s billionaires to surge by nearly €1 trillion.

Not accidentally, Podemos Labor Minister Yolanda Díaz has nearly doubled the capitalist state’s payoffs to the

unions since Podemos took office. On November 2, she pledged them €17 million in subsidies in the 2022 budget.

Pseudo-left parties like Podemos serve the financial aristocracy as weapons against the working class. They are terrified of the wave of strikes erupting in Spain, across the public sector in Portugal, and in industrial firms such as Deere, Dana and Volvo in the United States, where rank-and-file committees have been formed, supported by the ICFI. New organizations of struggle and a new revolutionary leadership in the working class must be built in Spain and internationally.

The PSOE-Podemos government knows it is fighting the danger of a general strike and of the eruption of revolutionary struggles in the working class. On Wednesday, *El Confidencial Digital* published extracts of a letter sent by a group of PSOE regional presidents to PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. The regional heads declare that they are “alarmed” at the levels of “social tension” in Spain, appealing to Sánchez do “do something.”

“A spark can light the streets on fire and turn into an imminent social explosion,” the letter declares, noting that the Cádiz strike could spread across all of Spain. It warns of the danger of strikes among auto-workers, farm and agribusiness workers, fishermen, and police and security staff.

The attempted union sabotage in Cádiz is a warning to workers across Spain and internationally about what is being prepared. A powerful offensive of the working class is emerging. The critical task is building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to fight against austerity and for a policy of elimination of the coronavirus, and constructing sections of the ICFI in Spain and internationally to give workers political leadership against pseudo-left parties like Podemos.



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