Union push to sell out Spanish steel strike exposes France's Révolution permanente

Anthony Torres
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The militant strike of over 20,000 metalworkers in Cádiz, Spain is exposing the anti-worker politics of union bureaucracies and petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties internationally. In Spain, the unions are isolating and trying to sell out the strike, while working hand in glove with the Podemos party, which is sitting in a government that is sending armored vehicles and riot police to attack strikers.

France's *Révolution permanente* web site, linked to the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) is playing a filthy role, providing political cover for the unions and Podemos. It falsely presents this strike as led by Spain's union bureaucracies—the social-democratic General Labor Union (UGT), the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO), and the anarchist General Confederation of Labor (CGT)—to win advances for their members. In a November 17 article titled "Cádiz, on strike for wages, metalworkers face police repression," it asserted:

> The contempt and the attacks carried out by the bosses, pressure from the workers themselves, convinced the national UGT and CCOO federations to call an unlimited strike starting on Monday, November 16 to change the balance of forces. … In order to do this, the CGT local at Airbus' Puerto Real plant calls in a communiqué not only to fight for wage increases—even though that is necessary—but also to struggle for the outlawing of sackings, like those that are currently taking place in Cádiz.

In reality, workers must organize themselves independently of and against the union bureaucracies and the political parties lining up with them. The bureaucracies led nothing; they desperately tried to hold workers back as long as they could, even as workers' anger mounted at the cuts in real wages and the planned closure of an Airbus plant that unions had agreed with management. Finally, after being compelled to announce an unlimited strike 10 days ago, they called off the strike yesterday, having negotiated only a pathetic 2 percent wage increase.

With inflation at 6 percent, this amounts to a large pay cut, on which management is making empty promises to make up in future years. The struggle against this attempt to sell out the strike must take the form not only of a struggle against the unions and Podemos, but against political forces like the NPA and *Révolution permanente* which seek to promote Podemos as a supposedly "left" party.

While *Révolution permanente* presented the union bureaucracies as leading the struggle, the unions are in fact direct political affiliates of the Spanish government. The UGT is historically linked to the PSOE, while the CCOO is linked to the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE) that is an integral part of the Unidas Podemos alliance. So, while *Révolution permanente* falsely promoted the UGT and CCOO as calling strikes and seeking to change the balance of forces, the bureaucracies were in close touch with the government as it moved to physically assault the strike.

While trying to promote illusions in the unions, *Révolution permanente* could not totally deny the explosive hostility building up in the working class to Podemos. However, they were careful not to warn workers that unions supposedly "leading" the struggle are in fact allies of the government ordering the police repression of the strike. Instead, they concluded with an empty flourish:

> Against bosses' attacks and the hypocrisy of a supposedly progressive government including Podemos, we must support the metalworkers' unlimited strike from concerted repression by the police and the government.

A class gulf separates *Révolution permanente* from the World Socialist Web Site, the publication of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). While criticizing the "hypocrisy" of Podemos, *Révolution*

permanente did not mention that the government was coordinating not only with the police but also with the trade unions that it was promoting. In contrast, the WSWS warned workers of the need to organize independently of the unions and prepare for a political struggle against Podemos. Speaking of the CCOO and UGT, the WSWS warned :

> Workers can give no confidence to these bureaucrats, who are political allies of the ruling parties against the strike and the working class. Their policy is two-faced, claiming to support workers while agreeing to slash their wages and shutter plants where they work, calling to demobilize protests, and coordinating closely with the parties of government who are assaulting workers with rubber bullets and pepper spray.

Over the next days, clashes mounted as police desperately tried to dislodge strikers who had occupied the metalworking complex and were barricading city streets. Union officials tried to demobilize the strike, criticizing strikers for setting up roadblocks in front of striking oil refineries and asking strikers to "leave highways unblocked." Anger erupted among workers in Cádiz and across the region on November 23, when Podemos sent decommissioned military armored cars against the strikers.

In a brief article, *Révolution permanente* blandly declared: "Faced with the mobilization, the left reformist PSOE-Podemos government did not hesitate to immediately try to crush the strike, using the Civil Guard and riot police that sent two armored cars to Cádiz to destroy strike pickets. This led to very violent repression widely seen on social media. … Despite ferocious repression, workers are determined to continue until their demands are met."

In the two articles it has devoted to the strike, *Révolution permanente* has not once advanced a call for a political struggle against Podemos or called for a break with the union bureaucracy. Given the violent hostility of the PSOE-Podemos government to the workers, and the complicity of the unions with the Podemos government, this silence demands an explanation.

In fact, this strike is part of a global upsurge of the class struggle amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The working class is in conflict with European governments' policy of allowing mass infection, which has cost over 1.3 million lives on this continent alone, devastated the economy and led to a surge in inflation. Strikes have erupted in Spain, in the public service in Portugal, and at major industries like Deere, Dana and Volvo in America, where workers have built rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, supported by the ICFI.

The Cádiz strike against Podemos is revealing the explosive class conflict between the working class and the "left populist" parties of the affluent middle class, and, therefore, the gulf separating the ICFI from the pseudo-left allies of the Podemos government like *Révolution permanente*. These forces, based in academia and the union bureaucracy, tolerate mass layoffs, wage cuts and mass infections and deaths in exchange for getting a say in the unions' negotiations with the capitalist state.

The Spanish ally of *Révolution permanente* and the NPA, the Anticapitalistas party, is openly seeking an alliance with the Podemos government while it unleashes the riot police on the workers. While claiming to be "behind the workers' struggle," it has launched an appeal to Podemos Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Díaz, declaring that anyone "who is in our ideological spectrum, and that is the case of Yolanda, can speak to us face to face and will find in us an ally."

The decisive question facing strikers in Cádiz and beyond is to organize themselves to oppose the unions' drive for a sell-out and to link their struggles to the growing international movement of the working class against wage austerity, social inequality, and policies of mass infection. This requires a struggle to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) against the national union bureaucracies, and to develop sections of the ICFI in Spain, France and beyond against pseudo-left defenders of the capitalist state like *Révolution permanente.*

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