

Workers' anger mounts at trade union sell-outs of strikes across Spain

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Numerous strikes involving hundreds of thousands of workers have been called off by the Spanish unions in the last weeks. This comes after a powerful, week-long strike of 22,000 metalworkers in Cádiz in late November, which rapidly developed into a head-on confrontation with the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government and their lackeys in the unions.

Workers in Cádiz faced down armoured vehicles and riot police, who assaulted them with tear gas, truncheons and rubber bullets. Strikers and their supporters responded by setting up pickets and barricades to fend off attempts by the police to retake the factories and send in scabs.

Terrified by Cádiz metalworkers' militant struggle, the unions worked to demobilise opposition and end the strike. They served as tools of the PSOE-Podemos government against the working class. During the walk-out, the Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the PSOE-aligned General Workers Union (UGT) repeatedly issued statements disavowing actions taken to defend the strike.

"We must manage this conflict well," the UGT and CCOO jointly declared, "... therefore we are asking that highways be left open." Denouncing strikers for setting fires outside of refineries to block access to the riot police, CCOO regional secretary Fernando Grimaldi also stated, "I do not agree at all with that type of action." Finally, on November 24, the UGT and CCOO came to a sellout agreement with the companies, which achieved none of the strike's main objectives.

Faced with an upsurge of the class struggle in Spain and internationally and desperate to prevent another Cádiz, the unions are scrambling to shut down strikes:

On November 30, two days of strike action by 36,000 metalworkers in Alicante were called off by the UGT and CCOO. The two unions reached an agreement with management for a pathetic 2 percent pay rise this year, followed by an "up to 0.75 percent" increase in 2022 and

"up to 0.5 percent" in 2023. With inflation at 6 percent in Spain, this is a de facto pay cut.

The UGT released a contemptible statement praising the sellout for ending the strike and supposedly helping the metal sector to grow: "although we have fallen short of our aims," it declares, "... we can say that we are satisfied because we are opening up a new period of stability and social peace in the sector in order that the companies can truly begin to recover, because the sector is not doing well."

A strike of around 400 workers at a Pilkington Automotive glass-manufacturing plant in Sagunto was ended by the UGT, CCOO and the anarchist General Confederation of Labour (CGT) on November 29. Workers had gone on strike against plans to fire around a third of the work force (116 workers). A protest against the job cuts last Wednesday attracted 5,000 local workers and supporters.

The union reached an agreement with Pilkington to supposedly avoid mass sackings on a "voluntary" early retirement scheme, affecting up to 50 employees. Workers initially rejected the unions' pre-agreement, but the CGT, CCOO and UGT forced a re-vote on the contract, pushing it through.

A walk-out by 6,500 supermarket workers in the Castilla y León region was cancelled by the UGT and CCOO, who reached a deal with the companies for a 15 percent pay increase over six years—2.5 percent annually. This "pay rise," well below inflation, would bring workers' salaries to just 1,200 Euros a month by 2026.

Industrial action by 600 transport workers in Huesca was cancelled by the UGT on December 2. Workers were set to strike for improved working conditions. Just hours before the strike was to begin, the union reached an agreement with the companies to

regulate part-time contracts and working hours. “While it’s not an excellent agreement,” the UGT admitted, “it is the best that could be achieved given the circumstances, to safeguard the pre-agreement we reached and adding what the assembly requested.” Around 60 percent of workers had rejected the pre-agreement at a meeting on November 22.

Eight days of stoppages by meat-processing workers set for late November and early December were called off by the CCOO and UGT on November 19. The strike, which would have mobilised 115,000 workers across Spain, was cancelled after the union and company agreed a 3 percent pay rise this year, followed by 2.75 percent next year and 2.5 percent in 2023.

On November 30, the CCOO called off the first day of a three-day strike of banking workers at Unicaja, due to take place on December 1-3. Workers were striking against plans to lay off over 1,500 employees (16 percent of the work force) and close 395 of the bank’s 1,457 offices. The CCOO claimed that as the company “slightly shifted its approach,” it was calling off the action “as a gesture of goodwill.”

Anger is growing among workers to continual betrayals by the anti-worker bureaucracies.

On November 30, after the UGT and CCOO “postponed” a strike by 8,000 cleaning workers in Castellón, the unions faced angry protests by a crowd of striking cleaners. As a CCOO official attempted to explain the decision taken by the negotiating committee—behind the backs of workers—to call off further action until December 13, workers condemned the union and called for the strike to be continued. One worker shouted: “Who decided that? ... Not us!”

“So who’s negotiating for our rights now?” one striker asked, while others demanded that the union “continue negotiating and we’ll stay on strike!” Another shouted: “so now it’s ok to hang us out to dry!”

The same day, around 4,500 workers protested in Barcelona against the insecure temporary working conditions of public sector workers. They marched to the Catalan CCOO headquarters, where they shouted slogans such as “End the pacts and betrayals, UGT and CCOO!” Others wrote “sell-outs,” “scabs” and “you are the shame of unionism” on the building’s walls.

A few days earlier, in Barcelona, auto workers booed and jeered union representatives outside a Nissan plant, shouting “out, out, out!” This came after the announcement that Chinese firm Great Wall Motors (GWM) would not take over production at Nissan’s three

Barcelona factories.

Last August, the CCOO, UGT and Union of Workers’ Syndicates (USO) ended a three-month strike at Nissan, after agreeing to a sellout deal to shutter the Barcelona plants, with the direct loss of nearly 2,500 jobs and another 20,000 in the supply chain. The unions had promised that other companies would participate in a “re-industrialisation” plan to keep the plants open.

In 1937, Leon Trotsky—co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution—discussed the scientific criteria employed by Marxists in defining the role of trade unions. He wrote:

The character of a workers’ organization such as a trade union is determined by its relation to the distribution of national income. The fact that Green and Company [anti-communist leaders of the American Federation of Labour] defend private property in the means of production characterizes them as bourgeois. Should these gentlemen in addition defend the income of the bourgeoisie from attacks on the part of the workers; should they conduct a struggle against strikes, against the raising of wages, against help to the unemployed; then we would have an organization of scabs, and not a trade union.

Based on these criteria, the CCOO, UGT, CGT and other bureaucracies in Spain can no longer legitimately be described as unions. Workers must break free of these company police forces, building independent rank-and-file committees in a political struggle against pseudo-left parties like Podemos.



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