

Police shoot Madrid striker as Spanish trucking strike mounts

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Truck drivers were on an indefinite nationwide strike for a second day yesterday, blocking major ports, highways and distribution centers across Spain. An estimated 75,000 truckers are joining the strike, called by the Platform for the Defense of Road Transport of Merchandise that account for 85 percent of smaller truck companies and self-employed truckers. They are protesting rising fuel prices and poor working conditions after decades of rampant exploitation.

The struggle is rapidly developing into a confrontation with Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government, which is deploying heavily armed police against the picket lines, and the NATO policy of war with Russia that is driving up fuel prices worldwide.

At a picket line in the industrial zone in San Fernando de Henares, Madrid, a striker was shot, reportedly when he resisted arrest, unaware that he was facing an undercover policeman. The striker, aged 33, was taken to the La Princesa hospital in serious condition with a gunshot wound to his abdomen. Another striker was injured less seriously by the police shooting.

This is a warning that the PSOE and Podemos are willing to unleash mass violence against strikers, only a few months after they deployed armored cars and police squads firing rubber bullets at striking metalworkers in Cadiz.

According to *El Confidencial Digital*, the PSOE-Podemos government has drafted plans to deploy the police and army to escort fuel truck convoys to gas stations. The Interior Ministry has a special police plan to escort convoys to transport medicine, food supplies, animals for slaughterhouses, supplies for livestock and industrial parts to factories. Yesterday, Spanish police already escorted more than 20 trucks in Asturias.

The strike is already having an immense impact, despite government denials. Spain's Logistics and Transport Business Organization warned of "serious complications"

in supply chains and requested "the immediate intervention of the Government to guarantee security and thus avoid a possible shortage." The Asturian employers association confirmed a "very high impact." The National Federation of Dairy Industries has warned that the strike could lead to "serious problems in the supply" of dairy products.

Throughout Spain, major ports are not fully functioning. The port of Bilbao, one of the main entry points in northern Spain, is paralysed. "By road, no commodity is leaving the port of Bilbao, no one works in Santurtzi, the port is stopped 100 percent. No truck is loading," a spokesperson for the Association of Self-Employed Carriers of the port of Bilbao told news agency EFE.

In Algeciras port, one of the world's busiest transshipment hubs, the Algeciras Bay Container Transport Association, with a fleet of 1,000 trucks, is supporting the strike.

The strike is also hitting major distribution centres. Mercamadrid, Spain's largest food distribution center, received only half of the usual products. Vegetables and fruits are most affected: The logistics centre received 60 percent of the produce compared to the week before. MercaGranada, which covers the province of Granada, reported that its activity was totally stopped due to the pickets.

In Cantabria, fishermen refused to fish, as the distribution of their fish catches was not guaranteed. In Cádiz Bay, fishermen moored their vessels in support of the transport strike, insisting that they cannot work at a loss.

Major factories are also reporting supply problems. The Opel factory in Zaragoza announced that it would stop Line 1, where the Citroën C3 Aircross and the Opel Crossland are manufactured, due to supply problems due to the transport strike.

Go-slow trucker convoys have snarled traffic in major

highways in cities including Madrid, Barcelona, Vitoria, Pamplona, Ferrol, Ponferrada and Murcia.

The bourgeois media and the PSOE-Podemos government are downplaying the impact of the strike. Transport Minister Raquel Sánchez claimed yesterday that it did not have “too much impact” and said, “The situation is under control.”

The PSOE-Podemos government is trying to channel rising anger at inflation by blaming Russian President Vladimir Putin amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In an utterly reckless and cynical attempt to deflect mounting class tensions outwards into a war fever, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez declared: “Blame is only Putin’s.” This hysterical anti-Russian propaganda has little or no support, however, outside the ruling class and the narrow layers of the affluent middle class around the “left populist” Podemos party.

Across Europe, there is vast working class opposition against involvement in a war with Russia. Last month, only 32 percent of Spaniards supported military involvement in a Russian-Ukraine conflict, according to a Euroskopia poll. The figure was only 31 percent in the Netherlands; 25 percent in Poland, Germany and France; 21 percent in Greece; and 18 percent in Italy.

José Fernández, a spokesperson for the Platform for the Defense of Road Transport of Merchandise that is calling the truckers strike, criticized Sánchez’s war fever.

He told the daily *El Plural*: “They want to blame Putin for the problems we have in Spain, but he is thousands of miles away. It is not Putin’s fault that in Spain we have inept, useless and corrupt politicians.” He also accused the far-right, NATO-backed regime in Ukraine of being “Nazi” and of ordering “the killing of Russians for speaking Russian” in eastern Ukraine.

A vast international movement of truckers is emerging against inflation and rising fuel prices. It has been produced firstly by vast money-printing operations in Washington, London and Frankfurt, pumping trillions of dollars, pounds and euros into financial markets during the pandemic in order to prop up stock markets and secure the wealth of the super-rich. Inflation is now surging as the NATO powers, recklessly threatening to provoke war with Russia, threaten to cut its oil, gas and grain out of world markets, massively driving up prices.

These reckless policies are driving an international explosion of class conflict, notably in the trucking industry due to its extraordinary vulnerability to fuel price increases:

- In Portugal, the ANTRAM truckers syndicate has

announced that 200 of its companies will hold back deliveries to force the Socialist Party (PS) government to cut the cost of fuel.

- Italian truckers are going out on a nationwide strike against high fuel prices and planning protest actions on March 19.

- In Brazil, truckers have appealed in court the decision of the state oil company Petrobras to increase gasoline prices by 18.8 percent and about 25 percent in the price of diesel.

- In Paraguay and Chile, governments have had to increase fuel subsidies in an effort to prevent truckers’ strikes.

The globalization of production and development of global supply chains places logistics workers in an extremely powerful position and reinforces their objective international unity.

This requires a conscious break with the trade unions. Desperate to maintain their position as the industrial police force of big business and capitalist governments, these nationally organized bureaucracies are determined to isolate and suppress strikes. Yesterday, Spain’s main union federations called off the freight transport strike of 3,000 wage-earning truck drivers in the province of Cádiz, cynically arguing that the employers were close to an agreement.

The struggle against the pandemic, inflation and war requires an international perspective, a conscious break with the trade unions and the PSOE-Podemos government, and the formation of independent rank-and-file committees. Through such committees, linked across industries and national boundaries, workers can develop a coordinated plan of action to defeat the assault on their pay and conditions and oppose the capitalist powers’ drive to war.



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