

Spain mobilises 23,000 police in bid to crush nationwide truckers strike

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government announced yesterday it is mobilising over 23,000 police to an estimated 75,000 striking truck drivers. The truckers have been on an indefinite nationwide strike since Monday, protesting rising fuel prices amid the NATO war drive targeting Russia and its energy exports over the war in Ukraine.

Yesterday, Transport Minister Raquel Sánchez dropped the pretence that the strike was not having a major impact and announced a massive police mobilisation. She said the Interior Ministry had told all Spanish regions to prepare police assault squads tasked with "organising and securing convoys of carriers of essential goods."

Hysterically denouncing striking truckers on the picket lines as violent criminals, she said: "We cannot allow them to subject that country to arm wrestling that we will not tolerate, we are working with the Interior Ministry to mobilise more than 15,000 officers to repress these violent actions that do not represent the industry. We are sensitive but we are not going to give into this blackmail, sabotage and boycott."

The police deployment prepared by the PSOE-Podemos government totals over 23,500 officers, including 7,122 National Police and 16,476 paramilitary Civil Guards. Regional police forces like the Basque Ertzaintza, the Catalan Mossos d'Esquadra and the Navarre Foral Police will also be mobilised.

It is critical to politically mobilise workers across Spain and internationally to defend truckers against the police onslaught being prepared by this pseudo-left and social-democratic coalition government. The deployment of unprecedented numbers of police is a desperate threat against this strike, which has had a powerful impact across Spain. It comes two days after an undercover cop shot a striking trucker on a picket line near Madrid.

The strike was called by the Platform for the Defense of Road Transport of Merchandise, which accounts for

account for 85 percent of smaller truck companies and self-employed truckers, to protest rising fuel prices and poor working conditions after decades of rampant exploitation. Although numbers are not clear, an estimated 25,000 to 85,000 truckers are joining the strike. The government claims that only 1,000 are involved, which is absurd. It would mean they have mobilised nearly three policeman for each striker.

The strike, consisting of pickets, multiple roadblocks and go-slow trucker convoys, mainly in the country's major cities and ports as well as industrial and commercial zones, is severely starting to affect supplies of agricultural and industrial products to the national and international markets.

Spain's CEOE and CEPYME business lobbies, representing big and small business, respectively, said the strike was "causing serious harm to the supply chain in industry, business and the food sector." Spain's national federation of dairy industries, FENIL, announced that some of its members had to halt production. Mercamadrid, Spain's largest wholesale market and produce distribution centre, received half the volume of fruit and vegetables yesterday of a normal day.

Factories are shutting down due to missing components. Multinational steel company ArcelorMittal is stopping production in Asturias. The Ford factory in Almussafes (Valencia) has had to stop vehicle production. Azucarera, the only sugar factory operating year round in Spain, has stopped its plant in Jerez de la Frontera.

The struggle erupted as a rebellion against the large truck drivers' associations and union bureaucracies organised in the National Committee for Road Transport (CNTC). The CNTC, the only state-recognized truckers organisation, has opposed the strike throughout. The strike is now developing into an open clash with Spain's PSOE-Podemos government, backed by the NATO military alliance and the banks.

This comprehensively exposes the PSOE-Podemos government. It has already proved its visceral hostility to the workers, imposing social austerity, slashing COVID-19 health measures, inciting militarism and anti-Russia hatred, and implementing violent anti-migrant policies.

The size of the police force mobilised by Podemos and the PSOE is historically unprecedented. Madrid mobilised around 12,000 police and Civil Guards to crack down on the 2017 Catalan independence referendum, wounding over 1,000 people as voters responded to police beatings at polling stations with mass civil disobedience. Prior to that, 18,000 troops and police were sent in October 1934 to crush the armed miners revolt in Asturias, two years before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Continuing the Stalinist tradition of slandering all their opponents as fascists, the PSOE-Podemos government is attacking the truckers as a far-right movement, though the Platform that is leading the strike has denied any link with the far-right and the neo-fascist Vox party.

After a meeting with the unions and members of the CNTC, Sánchez said she refused to meet the strikers, stating: “It is a boycott encouraged by violent positions of hatred, of the far-right, of the extreme right. It has nothing to do with the right to strike.”

Leading Podemos members like Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Díaz, ministers Ione Belarra, Alberto Garzón and Irene Montero, and former Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias have said nothing. This deafening silence on the strike, which amounts to a blank cheque to the riot police, is shared by the various pseudo-left satellites of Podemos. The Morenoite Revolutionary Workers’ Current (CRT) has written literally nothing on it in its web publication, Izquierda Diario.

The response of Podemos came, however, through its affiliated union, the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO), which is denouncing the strike. “There is no strike,” CCOO leader Unai Sordo said, denouncing the strikers for allowing self-employed truckers and the owners of small trucking businesses to join the strike. Sordo added, “they are the same ones who do not want to pay their drivers a salary, but rather by mileage.”

The social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT) shamelessly appealed to police to repress the strikers the same way they repress the UGT’s own members. UGT officials told *El Periódico de España* that police action should be intense, “just like what they exercise against us in our protests.”

They continued by denouncing self-employed strikers

for not contributing union dues to the UGT bureaucracy, declaring: “They should ask companies to put them on the payroll, because then they would be wage earners. Then they could go on a legal strike.”

This is another lie. The UGT and CCOO are determined to prevent the truckers strike from spreading to larger trucking companies and other layers of workers. Two days ago, they called off a freight transport strike by 3,000 wage-earning truck drivers in Cádiz province, cynically claiming employers were close to an agreement.

These events confirm the warnings of the WSWs. The NATO drive towards world war with Russia over Ukraine entails the preparation of war on the working class at home, with draconian attacks on workers’ living standards via price inflation. As the WSWs wrote last Friday:

The social consequences of this reckless campaign are preparations for a showdown between the working class and the capitalist class in each country, in which mass anger will intersect with the growing radicalization which is already underway as a consequence of the pandemic.... The response of capitalist governments claiming to be ‘defending freedom’ in Ukraine will inevitably involve the greater use of state repression, including injunctions, anti-strike legislation, executive orders and other measures to suppress working class opposition at home.

To defend their powerful struggle, the truckers require the support of the entire working class, mobilised independently of the union bureaucracies and petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties. This also entails opposing the NATO targeting of Russia. The alternative is the construction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, mobilised on a socialist struggle against exploitation, the ruling elite’s homicidal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the NATO drive to war.



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