

Defend Spanish truckers strike from PSOE-Podemos repression!

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For two weeks, 75,000 truck drivers from Spain's Platform for the Defense of Road Transport of Merchandise have been on indefinite nationwide strike against the global surge in fuel prices. They are demanding stable fuel prices, even as the NATO powers threaten to cut off Russian fuel exports amid the Russian-Ukraine war. The strike has already had a powerful impact, cutting off supplies to factories, industrial farms and supermarkets, costing Spanish corporations billions of euros.

The strike is developing into a political confrontation with Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government and its participation in the NATO war drive against Russia, which is accelerating inflation. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has admitted that sanctions against Russia "will have a cost and require sacrifices ... it will logically have an impact on the economy of families."

While on the one hand raising possible fuel subsidies, Sanchez is also refusing to negotiate with the Platform and launching a brutal crackdown. The PSOE and Podemos have deployed 23,000 police, the largest deployment against a strike ever in Spain. Heavily-armed police cars and helicopters are escorting scab drivers to supply supermarkets and industrial plants, and assaulting strikers on the picket lines. Police have shot and wounded one striking trucker on the picket lines and have arrested over 60, while giving fines to hundreds of strikers.

Defending truckers against PSOE-Podemos repression requires mobilizing the working class. The strike is part of an international movement against the economic fallout of the pandemic and of NATO threats against Russia that risk triggering a world war.

- In Turkey, where inflation has surged to over 50 percent according to highly-underestimated official

figures, a wave of strikes has erupted, many as wildcat actions independent of the unions. Auto workers, health care workers, metalworkers, iron miners, delivery couriers, ship-breaking workers, municipal workers and doctors have gone on strike, demanding higher pay and workplace protection from COVID-19.

- In Canada and the United States, tens of thousands of railway workers are in struggle against arbitrary work schedules imposed as the COVID-19 pandemic destabilizes global supply chains. Canadian Pacific (CP) railway workers are on strike, while American BNSF workers face an anti-strike injunction from a US judge. The Biden White House is also in talks with United Steelworkers Union officials to block a strike by 30,000 US oil refinery workers.

- In India, 70,000 Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) bus agency workers are on a 20-week strike, defying government injunctions and threats of mass arrests. MSRTC has fired or suspended over 14,000 workers as they demand better pay and benefits, and compensation for the families of over 700 who have died of COVID-19.

- Protests and strikes are mounting across Europe, including in Spain. Truckers in Germany, Greece, Italy and France have mounted strikes or go-slow actions on highways against fuel price rises. Protests are mounting in Britain after P&O Ferries sacked its entire 800-strong workforce using a private security agency and scab workers. And as French mass transit workers are set to go out on strike today, in Spain, 60,000 teachers in Catalonia went on a three-day strike demanding more investment in education.

The Spanish truckers strike has confirmed a basic axiom of Marxism: to wage war abroad, the bourgeoisie wages class war against workers at home. Sanchez is pledging to raise the defence budget by €10

billion to €25 billion per year, but the PSOE and Podemos are refusing to help truckers who transport the economic lifeblood of society. Instead, they are unleashing police and a hysterical anti-trucker media campaign, led by PSOE ministers and Stalinist union hacks affiliated to Podemos.

Transport Minister Raquel Sánchez has refused to meet the Platform that is calling the strike. She denounced the strike as “enormous irresponsibility” and the Platform as “a minority group encouraged by the extreme right and anti-democratic groups.” She ignored the Platform’s statement insisting it has no ties to the fascistic Vox party, which has made hypocritical statements of support for the strike even as the police attack strikers.

The PSOE-Podemos government, while deploying troops to Eastern Europe to threaten Russia, is shamelessly denouncing truckers as tools of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Finance Minister María Montero has attacked the truckers for “playing the game of Putin,” while Minister of the Presidency Félix Bolaños called them “an ally of instability, and that is what Putin would like.”

An equally filthy role is played by the trade union stooges of Podemos. The Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) union issued a joint statement with the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT), denouncing striking truckers as “violent groups.” It hypocritically attacked the Platform for including small businesses, claiming the strike is a business stoppage and, as such, not protected by labor law.

Encarna Chacón, the CCOO general secretary in Extremadura, one of the regions most affected by the strike, denounced the truckers, comparing them to France’s “yellow vest” protests against social inequality. “In Spain we cannot be like France was with the ‘yellow vests’. If there is someone who wants this, we believe they are wrong,” she said, adding: “this union has never defended wildcat strikes, nor are we ever going to defend them.”

Strikers are not tools of Putin, but the PSOE, Podemos and the unions are tools of the banks and of NATO. Reckless NATO threats against Russia face overwhelming popular opposition. Polls have found that 68 percent of Spaniards do not support involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, while 86

percent are “quite” or “very” afraid of the war’s effect on prices.

Against rising prices, workers must fight not only their effects, but also their causes. Inflation is in the final analysis the product of ceaseless redistribution of wealth to the financial aristocracy inherent in the capitalist system. Trillions of dollars, pounds and euros were printed and pumped into stock markets to boost the portfolios of the wealthy and affluent during the pandemic, even as millions were allowed to die. Now inflation is surging, as NATO, recklessly threatening war with Russia, works to cut its oil, gas and grain out of world markets, thus further driving up commodity prices.

Working and self-employed people around the world find themselves in struggle against a ruling class that has nothing to offer but an unending pandemic, low wages, social austerity and war.

Workers across all industries must draw their own conclusions from the union bureaucracy’s pledges not to organize strikes, and its attacks on movements like the “yellow vests,” organized independently of the unions on social media. Control of strike activity must be taken out of the hands of petty-bourgeois bureaucracies like the Stalinist CCOO.

To overcome the slanders and strike-breaking of the unions and pseudo-left parties like Podemos, workers need new organizations, rank-and-file workplace committees, to wage the class struggle. Unified in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, workers could wage a powerful struggle against capitalism’s drive to war and to impoverish the working class. Workers and youth who support such a perspective should contact the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and join the fight to build sections of the ICFI in Spain and internationally.



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