

Striking Spanish truckers reject inadequate state bailout offer

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Tens of thousands of Spanish truckers, who have been out for two weeks on an indefinite nationwide strike against fuel price increases, rejected a proposed settlement yesterday. They are maintaining strike action at key ports and industrial facilities across Spain, shutting factories that cannot get parts and limiting supplies in supermarkets.

Social-democratic Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez proposed a €16 billion package in state-backed loans. He detailed the plan at a business forum of IBEX-35-listed corporations after urgent demands from Spanish financial circles to end the strike. He pledged to discuss a plan today in his cabinet to release “approximately 6.0 billion euros in direct aid and tax rebates and 10 billion euros in state-guaranteed loans to cushion the impact of the crisis on families and businesses.”

This is a temporary measure that will only partially compensate for the explosion in fuel prices. It is to remain in place until June 30 and effect “a minimum reduction of 20 cents per liter of fuel,” Sanchez said, with 15 cents of the reduction being financed by the state and 5 cents by oil companies. On Monday, average petrol prices in Spain ranged between €1.84 and 1.98 per liter, while diesel stood at between €1.86 and 1.95.

The Platform for the Defense of Road Transport of Merchandise, the association of small trucking firms and self-employed truckers which has called the strike, issued a statement rejecting the package as inadequate and demanding a law ensuring that their clients cannot force them to operate at a loss. “The analysis of the current situation in transport is that for now, we are much worse off working than we are striking, fuel is expensive and expected to rise much higher,” the Platform stated, adding: “We will continue to the end.”

Sanchez’s proposed measures do not address truckers’ concerns or address the underlying causes of price hikes that are devastating working people in Spain and internationally. Prices for fuel, foodstuffs and other basic commodities have surged as inflation is driven by the disorganization of supply chains and massive printing of money by central banks, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic. NATO’s policy of cutting Russian oil, gas and grain out of world markets amid the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine is further accelerating the surge in prices.

Deputy Prime Minister and Labor Minister Yolanda Diaz, who is also the leader of the Podemos party, hailed Sanchez’s proposal to the IBEX-35: “This situation is absolutely exceptional and the steps we’re taking will, I think, offer us a way out of this huge crisis.” In reality, Sanchez’s package neither aims to redistribute the trillions of euros handed over to the investing classes in recent years, nor to end the mounting danger of a world war erupting in Europe.

With its €16 billion package, Sanchez’s Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos coalition government hopes to end the strike, which it has failed to suppress despite a massive mobilization of 23,000 riot police, without ending any of its anti-worker policies to enrich the financial aristocracy.

Demands for Sanchez’s package came not from the strikers, who are demanding legal protection from being forced to operate at a loss due to high fuel prices, but from Spanish big business. Last week, the Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (CEOE) issued a warning demanding urgent action to end the strike before it causes greater damage to their profits and provokes an uncontrollable eruption of strikes and protests.

“In this situation,” the CEOE wrote in a statement,

“the clamor from business and from society threatens to erupt in the face of political inaction. ... It is difficult to understand why action was not more rapidly taken in the face of supply shortages and to help those who could not keep their businesses active because of the strike.”

The statements of the CEOE and of Sanchez’s PSOE demanding an end to the strike were echoed by the trade union bureaucracies, that have denounced the truckers strike as illegal, and the “left populist” Podemos party, which has slandered the truckers as fascists.

Yesterday, Podemos parliamentary spokesman Pablo Echenique again attacked the Platform, saying the strike should have ended after the state reached a deal with larger trucking companies.

“The most reasonable would be to end the strikes” after the PSOE-Podemos government reached a deal with the big-business National Confederation of Road Transport (CNTC), he said. He added, “the spokesman of the transport association that has led the strike is a man of Vox,” Spain’s main neo-fascist party, ignoring repeated statements from Transport spokesman Manuel Fernandez that he has no political affiliations.

Spain’s trade unions have worked to isolate the truckers strike and refused to mobilize workers in their defense. The Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) union said that the government “needs to take measures to get out of this situation [of] an enormous conflict in a sector like logistics,” adding that “in some way we must get out of this dead end.”

As the Platform negotiates today with the PSOE-Podemos government, press sources across Spain are insisting that the strike is virtually over. The Europa Press news agency wrote: “According to reports from various industry sources, both management and trade unions, this weekend activity has been 97 percent of normal and the ports have gone back to normalcy ...”

In reality, local press reports and statements from striking truckers make clear that the strike is very much continuing, and having a broad impact on ports, supermarkets, and factories:

- The port of Valencia said that the level of congestion is “very high” due to the truckers’ strike, since only 30 percent of the normal number of trucks there still operating. The Port Authority has been forced to “stop” entry of shipping containers into the port. The

president of the Port Transport Association (Asotranport), Álvaro Ortiz, reported yesterday that some 2,000 trucks have been stopped since early in the morning at the Port of Valencia.

- At the port of Barcelona, truckers confirmed to press sources that they are continuing the strike and are planning to blockade port infrastructure in the coming days, after police operations smashed through pickets outside port and food transport facilities in the city earlier in the strike.

- At the port of Bilbao, 450 of the roughly 700 trucks that work to unload and transport containers were on strike and rejected an inadequate offer of improved conditions from port authorities. “No one wants to work at a loss,” the Transport association declared.

- Further go-slow actions were reported in Galicia and the Canary Islands. The regional coordinator of Transport in the Asturias region, José Fernández, also denied reports that the strike is weakening there and said it is continuing, due to a “lack of political will” on the part of the government to resolve the problems causing the strike.

The PSOE-Podemos government is in the meantime escalating the repression of the strike carried out by the tens of thousands of police they have mobilized against the truckers. At the end of last week, the Spanish Interior Ministry reported that 67 truckers had been jailed and that police units had escorted 6,969 convoys of trucks driven by scab drivers. However, there are indications that this may be a substantial underestimate. Regional authorities in Castilla y Leon said that 40 truckers have been arrested and 6,000 trucks escorted in their region alone.

The decisive question now is the mobilization of broader layers of the working class to defend the truckers against the reactionary policies of the PSOE-Podemos government and the NATO alliance.



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