

# Spanish truckers “temporarily suspend” 3-week strike against high fuel prices

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Spain’s truck drivers agreed Saturday to “temporarily suspend” a 20-day strike over crippling fuel prices amid the NATO war drive targeting Russia and its energy exports over the war in Ukraine. The strike is a significant strategic experience for the working class as it enters into struggle against war, inflation and the unbearable cost of living. The strike was isolated and viciously attacked by pro-corporate unions and Spain’s ruling pseudo-left Podemos party.

The decision to suspend the strike was reached at an assembly meeting of the Platform for the Defense of Road Transport of Merchandise, an association of small trucking firms and self-employed truckers which called the strike. It gathered around 100 self-employed truckers at a petrol station in the Madrid region city of San Fernando de Henares. They agreed to pause their action, with spokesman Manuel Hernandez insisting it was a temporary suspension and not a cancellation of the strike.

Hernandez said it is time to “be smart, and know how to manage the strength that the group has harvested in recent weeks, to strike the second blow, which is going to come.” Hernández insisted the “this is not over,” adding: “We have endured the days on strike heroically. We have to organise ourselves even more in the provinces and prepare ourselves, so that, in a short period of time, we can return to act with more force.”

In Bilbao, nearly 700 self-employed truckers have continued the strike by blocking the Port of Bilbao, the major port in northern Spain, to demand an update of rates.

The suspension of the strike comes on the same day that the discount of 20 cents per litre of gasoline until June 30 for all drivers comes into force, one of the measures that the PSOE-Podemos Government agreed to along with a package of €1 billion in aid for the sector.

Truckers are aware that the conditions underlying the strike will continue to deteriorate, regardless of the

temporary subsidy. A self-employed truck driver from Granada, Jesus Cuenca, told the WSW: “We obtained 20 cents [per litre]. It’s a small band aid for a war wound. And this will only last until June. We know fuel prices will continue to escalate while the [Russia-Ukrainian] war lasts.” He said they will use this time to “strengthen the Platform. It is a suspension [of the strike], not the end of it. We will become stronger.”

Capitalist media and trade unions initially ignored the strike, called on March 14. The Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government insisted the strike would have no impact on the economy and claimed there was “little or no margin” to help the trucking industry.

The strike rapidly drew in tens of thousands of truckers, however, as truckers organised through social media. An estimated 75,000 truckers joined.

The strike soon had a powerful impact. Blocking roads, major ports and logistics centres with picket lines, the strikers exposed the lies of the trade unions and the government, who claimed it had no economic impact. Major factories were forced to shut down due to missing components, including multinational steel company ArcelorMittal, the Ford factory in Almussafes (Valencia) and sugar producer Azucarera. Automaking, fisheries and agriculture suffered bottlenecks, causing shortages of rice, flour, eggs and dairy products in supermarkets and costing Spanish corporations billions of euros.

Under mounting pressure from thousands of small trucking businesses and self-employed truckers outside of the Platform for the Defense of Road Transport of Merchandise, major transport unions and associations like the Hiru Basque Self Employed Carrier Union, Asemtrasam, the Galician Federation of Freight Transport (Fegatramer) and the Navarrese Association of Carriers (Tradisna), among others, joined the strike.

These organisations are part of the National Committee on Road Transport (CNTC), composed of Spain’s major

national trade unions and the largest employers in the trucking sector: the National Federation of Transport Associations of Spain (Fenadismer), and the Spanish Confederation of Freight Transport (CETM), which bitterly opposed the strike.

When the strike started, the CNTC issued a statement citing the NATO war drive against Russia to call to end the strike. It said: “This is not the time to start a transport strike, especially not if it is called as an indefinite action and without any clear goals, because this will simply end up destabilizing even more a complicated situation that we are passing through due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.”

The growing popularity of the strike soon forced the PSOE-Podemos government to change tactics. While on the one hand raising possible fuel subsidies, the government launched a brutal crackdown, deploying over 23,000 police to suppress the strike—the largest deployment against a strike ever in Spain. The police made 69 arrests and fined hundreds of strikers. Heavily-armed police cars and helicopters escorted 8,300 convoys to supply supermarkets and industrial plants, and assaulted strikers on the picket lines. One striking trucker was shot and another wounded.

This was accompanied by a mass media campaign backed by the trade unions, the Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT).

PSOE-Podemos government Finance Minister María Montero denounced strikers for “playing the game of Putin” and slandered them as members of the neo-fascist Vox party.

Determined to prevent the truckers strike from spreading to larger trucking companies and other layers of workers, CCOO and UGT called off a freight transport strike by 3,000 wage-earning truck drivers in Cádiz province, cynically claiming employers were close to an agreement. They then issued a joint statement denouncing striking truckers as “violent.” They hypocritically attacked the Platform for including small businesses, claiming the strike is a business stoppage and, as such, not protected by labor law.

The UGT bureaucracy shamelessly appealed to police to repress striking truckers and their 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.”

On March 25, the government met with the CNTC, refusing to meet the Platform. It announced it would give

financial aid to transport workers, including fuel subsidies, to end the strike. Soon after, associations within the CNTC decided go back to work, leaving the self-employed truckers of the Platform alone. By the end of the week, the Platform decided to call the temporary suspension of the strike.

Is critical that workers draw political lessons from this internationally significant struggle.

Throughout the strike, the unions have refused to call any other major strikes. Now that the strike has been called off, the unions, under mounting pressure, have called 28,000 logistics workers on strike in Guadalajara on April 5-7. Like the truck drivers, logistics workers are struggling against the high cost of living. They are demanding a higher raise than the 2 percent offered as inflation reaches 10 percent, which could mean up to €800 less a year for each full-time worker.

To break out of the isolation imposed by the trade unions on their struggles, self-employed truck drivers and small business require the support of the entire working class, mobilised independently of the union bureaucracies and Podemos.

At the same time, the growing ruthlessness of the ruling class demonstrates the need for workers to mobilise internationally. As Spain’s truckers launched the strike, similar strike actions and calls for strikes emerged among truckers in Germany, Italy, Brazil, Peru and France. In Morocco, truckers announced over the weekend they will strike on Wednesday to protest fuel price hikes.

Controlling fuel prices and ending the impoverishment of workers via inflation requires stopping the NATO war drive against Russia and the endless payouts of bank bailouts to the super-rich. The alternative is the construction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, mobilised in a struggle for socialist policies against exploitation and imperialist war.



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