

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government bans walkout as Ryanair workers strike across Europe

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As airline and airport workers walk out in an escalating wave of struggles across Europe, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos cracked down on the three-day European Ryanair cabin crew strike by imposing draconian minimum services, thereby making it illegal for most staff to strike.

On Friday, cabin crews in Belgium, Spain and Portugal walked out against the onslaught on their jobs, wages and conditions. It is the first of a three-day strike. The company was forced to cancel 315 flights to and from Brussels international airport during the three-day strike. In Spain, where Ryanair employs 1,900 people, no flights were canceled except those heading to Belgium, and two flights from Portugal to Brussels were canceled as well.

In France, cabin crews are striking today and tomorrow. In Italy, a one-day strike will be held today. Spanish workers are also scheduled to strike from June 30 to July 2.

Ryanair is just one of many airlines to be affected by strike action this summer. Brussels Airlines pilots and cabin crews started a three-day strike on Thursday, finishing today. In France, Air France pilots, went on strike today against the safety risks of increasing capacity during the busy summer season.

In Spain, EasyJet cabin crews plan to go on strike for nine days intermittently in July (1-3, 15-17 and 29-31) to demand higher wages. Flight attendants are demanding a 40 percent increase in their basic salary, which stands at 950 euros (\$1,000).

In Northern Europe, around 900 pilots from Denmark, Norway and Sweden's flag carrier Scandinavian Airlines are set to strike in late June.

Ground crew staff at airports across Europe are also

going on strike. Over the weekend, French air traffic controllers centred in Marseille are striking, severely delaying and impacting flights crossing French airspace. These strikes come weeks after a one-day strike by ground staff at the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris that forced the cancellation of one-quarter of flights through the airport. They are demanding a €300 monthly raise amid spiraling increases in the cost of living, and further action is being planned for July 2.

On Monday, Brussels Zaventem Airport had to cancel all departing flights during action from security staff. On Thursday, hundreds of British Airways workers at Heathrow Airport voted in favour of strike action later this summer to demand the reinstatement of a 10 percent pay cut imposed during the peak of the pandemic.

Airline workers are a strategic section of the working population whose mobilisation points to the vast social and industrial power of the international working class. Strikes are mounting over the surge in the cost of living and the consequences of the disastrous official handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unified and coordinated across national borders and different job designations, they could rapidly shut down Europe's airspace and bring the economy to its knees.

Such actions could win powerful support among broader layers of the European working class, amid growing strikes by health care, metal, rail and trucking workers—laying the basis for a coordinated struggle against inflation, official policies on the pandemic and the diversion of massive resources to the NATO military build-up and war against Russia. It takes place as Boris Johnson's Conservative government in the UK confronts the biggest national rail strike in a generation,

involving more than 50,000 workers.

Such a struggle requires, however, a break with with the national union bureaucracies. At present, the various unions are working to divide strikes along national and industrial lines, schedule strikes on different days and keep workers from mobilising their full strength against Ryanair and allied governments.

Currently, Ryanair is brazenly planning to ride out the strike, relying on the support of capitalist governments across Europe. Ryanair stated that less than 2 percent of its 3,000 flights have been affected by European cabin crew strikes.

At the onset of the strike, Ryanair CEO Eddie Wilson arrogantly said: “We believe stoppages are not going to have a great follow-up and that the impact will be minimal.” He added, “Even if cabin crews are going to go on strike, they have to operate those flights by law.”

Wilson was referring to the draconian anti-strike measures imposed by Spain’s PSOE-Podemos government before the first day of the strike. The Ministry of Transport declared that 73 to 82 percent of Ryanair flights were covered by “minimum services” laws—that is, that they are so strategic to the Spanish economy that the government can ban strike action against their operation. On this basis, Ryanair workers in Spain largely showed up for work yesterday.

This marks yet another assault by the pseudo-left Podemos party on the struggles of the working class. In November, it deployed armored vehicles and riot police against striking metalworkers in Cadiz, and in April it mobilised 23,000 police to crush a truckers strike protesting rising fuel prices amid NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine. Spain’s principal unions, affiliated to the PSOE or Podemos, isolated the strikers in both struggles and imposed a concessions contract on the Cadiz workers.

The Ryanair strike is no exception: Management is working directly with national governments and union bureaucracies to isolate and shut down the strike. From the outset, the trade unions signaled that they were willing to sabotage the strike by complying with “minimum service” requirements. In Spain, the unions USO (Unión Sindical Obrera) and SITCPLA (Sindicato Independiente de Tripulantes de Cabina de Pasajeros de Líneas Aéreas) negotiated with Ryanair for minimum services ranging from 25 to 50 percent.

Ryanair management also has resorted to signing

contracts with factions of the union bureaucracy that do not even represent any Ryanair workers—the Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) in Spain and the Union of Portuguese Transport Workers (STTAMP). Trampling labor law underfoot, Ryanair is now trying to impose these contracts on the workforce.

The grip of these unions over struggles by pilots, cabin crews and ground staff must be broken for workers to be able to unite and bring their collective strength to bear against transnational corporations such as Ryanair. For this, workers need new rank-and-file committees to coordinate their struggles across national borders and appeal for support from transport workers internationally.

This is the function of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in April 2021. The IWA-RFC plays the central role in providing a framework in which workers can organise and coordinate strike actions, while opposing the sabotage of their struggles by reactionary union bureaucracies and pseudo-left parties such as Podemos.



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