

Spanish home care workers continue strike after two-week stoppage

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Three thousand five hundred Home Care Service (SAD) workers in Asturias, northern Spain, are continuing their strike over working conditions and low wages, now running for 18 days. It is being led by the Platform for HCS Workers and the HCS Workers Collective of Asturias which has grown following mass anger at the unions' back-door talks with employers.

SAD workers are one of the most exploited sections of the Spanish working class. The average salary is €1,050 gross a month (\$1,045) for a 38.5-hour week, although the most common contract is 30 hours, considerably reducing the monthly wage. Part-time contracts (80 percent of workers) dominate the sector, in which female workers make up over 90 percent of the workforce.

Workers make enormous physical efforts caring for elderly and dependents, with tasks like bathing, replacing bandages, dressing, mobility support, health monitoring, medication administration, and transporting the elderly to day centres. One worker told *La Vanguardia*, “If a dependent weighs 80 kilos and you move him or her five times in an hour, from the bed to the chair, from the chair to the shower, from the shower to the chair... you end up moving 400 kilos.”

Another worker, Arancha Suárez, told *La Voz de Asturias*, “I’m 47 years old, and I have worked as a home care support worker since I was 19. I now live worse than before.”

On Saturday, hundreds of SAD workers marched through the Asturian capital of Oviedo to demand “decent” working conditions. They chanted, “We are not invisible, we are essential” and “unity makes us stronger.” This was the second demonstration since the strike began on August 16, due to the opposition to the collective agreement being negotiated between the trade unions—the Podemos-linked Workers

Commissions (CCOO) and the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT)—and the sector’s business federation.

CCOO and UGT refused to join the demonstration, aware of the mounting anger among the workers after they tried to ram through the latest collective agreement behind workers’ backs.

The week before, HCS workers voted to reject the “ridiculous proposals” made by employers and the unions. Employers have falsely claimed they proposed a 17 percent wage increase. The truth is they are offering a retroactive increase of 0 percent (for 2021), 1.5 percent (2022), 1.5 percent (2023) and 1 percent (2024 and 2025). With inflation at 10.4 percent, this means a monthly wage cut of hundreds of euros. According to the Platform’s calculations, this would pauperize workers with a 16.5 percent real wage cut.

Once the current contracts are re-tendered, employers are proposing a maximum 12 percent increase from 2025. This does not even compensate for the 16.5 percent salary reduction that workers would suffer until then if they accepted the employers’ proposal.

The unions intervened to close down the strike as soon as they could. Hoping to do so in 24 hours, CCOO and UGT called off the strike and called workers to vote a few hours after the employers sent the proposal. They did not even provide workers a summary of the proposal. They called for five assemblies across the region at 17:30, to which workers had to attend with their IDs and latest salary sheet. Doors were closed at 18:00, after which workers were barred from entry.

The SAD Workers Platform denounced this in a statement, stating, “An assembly of workers in which the doors are closed at a certain time and no one else is allowed to enter. An assembly in which they want to approve a proposal that remains in the darkest of

secrets. What kind of democracy is this? What is the true objective of this assembly?"

It added, "We have not done ten days of indefinite strike to end up swallowing the employers' demands. We have the strength to conquer a worthy agreement and we are going to conquer it! That is why we reject this hasty and anti-democratic call of the CCOO and UGT. We are not going to accept, locked up under pressure in a closed room, the blackmail of the bosses. For this reason, we call on all of you to attend this afternoon's assemblies en masse and vote a resounding NO to the bosses' blackmail."

The employers proposal was rejected by a majority. Of 3,000 workers called, around 600 attended the assemblies to vote. The rejection of the union-backed collective agreement won by 40 votes.

The following day, workers called for the continuation of the strike and more protests across the region. These continue to this day. The strikers have received wide support among workers around the region, and mass sympathy across Spain. Workers have managed to collect strike funds to continue the stoppage.

This is a significant offensive of a small but militant section of the working class, which is showing readiness to struggle against the union bureaucracy in order to take a fight against employers. After years of repeated betrayals by CCOO and UGT, workers have organised independently in the Platform and SAD Workers Collective.

As one worker told *La Voz de Áviles*, "The relationship with the unions is broken because everything they do is to hinder us and do nothing, they only think about taking a photo and leave. There is a bad atmosphere and bad vibes, for example we believe that the minimum services are abusive..." The worker was referring to the union-sanctioned minimum services imposed by companies, some at 100 percent, to break the strike.

The perspective that dominates the Platform and the SAD Workers Collective, however, is one of putting pressure on the CCOO and UGT. The Platform is now seeking to enter negotiations with the employers, demanding that they too sit alongside the unions at the negotiating table. This still leaves the initiative, however, in the hands of the union bureaucracies.

Workers can only fight the devastation of wages and

working conditions by taking the struggle out of the hands of CCOO and UGT, including building independent, rank-and-file committees and linking them to other workers in struggle internationally. Workers across Spain and internationally face the same fundamental issues: soaring inflation, austerity, policies of mass COVID infection, and the NATO war on Russia.

This also requires irreconcilable opposition to Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government and its various political satellites. Workers cannot fight the attacks of the ruling class on their wages by putting pressure on the unions or Podemos. Inflation and rising energy prices are rooted in decades of processes in which the trade unions and their political adjuncts have been complicit: bank and corporate bailouts, reckless pandemic policies and the proxy war against Russia. Podemos has played a leading role in all of these policies.

SAD workers have already had bitter experiences with the pseudo-left Podemos party. In 2019, Yolanda Díaz, Podemos' Minister of Labour and de facto leader, promised to include HCS workers in the Law of Labor Risks Prevention, which would classify them as nurses. She then refused to meet with SAD workers who protested outside her ministry.

As strikes mount among US nurses, in the British National Health Service, and health and home care workers internationally, it is critical to unify these struggles in opposition to pseudo-left parties like Podemos in the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees in an international movement against inflation, war and the capitalist system.



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