Spanish Morenoites back Podemos government's moves to suppress struggles against inflation

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Spain's pseudo-left Morenoite Revolutionary Workers' Current (CRT) is doubling its efforts to shield the left flank of the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government amid mounting working class anger at inflation and war across Europe.

The CRT is terrified of growing working class struggles against massive price hikes being used to pass on costs of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine to workers. It is trying to block a revolt of the working class against national union bureaucracies, the PSOE-Podemos' government and the war by promoting the Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT) unions. This is the content of a video-editorial posted by CRT leader Santiago Lupe on the *Izquierda Diario* web site.

Lupe begins, "Big business is refusing to increase salaries as per inflation. And, what are CCOO and UGT saying? That if big business doesn't increase wages we are going to have a 'hot autumn.'" For this "plan" to have "credibility," Lupe states, "we must ask them: what are you waiting for to call assemblies in the workplaces and to lay out a plan of struggle? We must demand [CCOO and UGT] call a general strike to start the 'hot autumn.'"

Lupe then lists various national demands the unions will supposedly advance under pressure of what he calls "the trade union left and anticapitalist left forces" like CRT: an "11 percent increase in wages and pensions," "monthly wage indexation to inflation," "minimum wage of 1,500 euros," a "30-hour work week," "nationalisation of electricity companies" and "price controls established by workers and consumers."

Lupe concludes his video bemoaning that CCOO and UGT are silent on "the underlying reasons for this crisis: the war and the imperialist escalation of NATO countries, in preparation to dispute markets and zones of influence with other powers."

Lupe is advancing the fraudulent perspective that the trade unions, deeply tied to the PSOE-Podemos government, can lead a struggle against a global inflation policy being implemented by the ruling class and the US-NATO war on Russia in Ukraine.

This is ludicrous. First, a "hot autumn" is developing, but this is an international phenomenon. Workers everywhere are fighting against brutal overwork, the spiralling cost of living and the disastrous human toll of the pandemic. There are mounting struggles among rail workers, health care staff, autoworkers, service workers, educators and other sections of the working class across the globe.

Lupe, however, is promoting the lie that Spanish workers are facing a purely national struggle on purely national issues. The fact is, none of these great threats facing the working class—inflation, the pandemic, nuclear war, climate change—can be addressed on a national basis.

The development of a working class movement against these existential threats requires at every point the building of independent workers organisations, rank-and-file committees, that will unite workers in Spain and internationally in a revolt against the national union bureaucracies.

Second, the unions are not instruments of class struggle, as CRT claims, but tools of the capitalist state and its war policy. The CCOO and UGT have backed Spanish imperialism, including calling on workers on 5-minute stoppages to support the NATO-backed, far-right regime in Ukraine against Russia, supporting pro-war resolutions and domestic war measures like the latest energy saving plan. This plan, passed by the PSOE-Podemos government, includes limits on air-conditioning and heating in winter as part of an EU-wide effort to reduce reliance on Russian gas.

The PSOE-Podemos government, as part of the NATO alliance, is fully involved in the war for regime change and the dismemberment of Russia, risking nuclear war. In recent weeks, it has sent armoured vehicles, anti-aircraft batteries and tons of artillery shells to Ukraine. Madrid has also promised to train Ukrainian troops in the military's Zaragoza facilities, where some 600 wounded Ukrainian soldiers are already being treated by Spanish doctors.

To wage war abroad and class war at home, the Spanish government depends on CCOO and UGT to act as domestic labour police, holding back the rising tide of social opposition. Over the past year, they have smashed one strike after another.

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Before the war, the CCOO and UGT strangled a week-long strike by 22,000 metalworkers in Cádiz in November. After strikers occupied their workplaces and defeated attempts by the PSOE-Podemos government's riot police to retake the factories, even deploying armoured cars in the working class neighbourhoods of Cádiz to terrorize the public, the unions called off the strike. They agreed to a 2 percent wage increase as inflation exploded. Metalworkers now face an 8 percent real wage cut.

In March, an estimated 75,000 smaller truck companies and self-employed truckers launched a 20-day strike, protesting rising fuel prices. Major factories of multinational steel companies, automakers and sugar producers had to shut down operations due to missing components. Supermarkets faced shortages of rice, flour, eggs and dairy products. The strike cost Spanish capital billions of euros.

CCOO and UGT opposed the strike, denouncing truckers as "violent groups" and calling on workers to refuse any solidarity with them. This facilitated PSOE-Podemos efforts to crush the strike using 23,000 police—the largest policy deployment against a strike in Spanish history.

In May, tens of thousands of metalworkers went on strike in Galicia and Cantabria. The unions once sold out the strikes with below-inflation wage increases of 4 percent. The same month, textile workers, teachers, doctors, taxi drivers and workers in other industries also launched major strikes.

One struggle after another, they were all betrayed. Last week's Ministry of Labor figures show that collective agreements negotiated between the unions and management from January to August covered 7.1 million workers, with a 2.6 percent average wage increase. Amid the rampant 10.4 percent inflation levels, this means an 8 percentage point cut in real wages.

CRT, acting like advisers to the union bureaucracy, calls on these anti-worker bureaucracies, handsomely paid by the state to the tune of millions, to police the working class, and to call for a "general strike."

The union bureaucracy is capable of calling a token, one-day national strike as proposed by the CRT. Since the 2008 global economic crisis, the unions have called for four one-day national stoppages under mounting pressure. None have achieved their nominal aim of reversing austerity, labour and pensions reforms.

This month, the unions are scheduled to organise protests to demand 3.5 percent wage increases this year, 2.5 percent in 2023 and 2 percent in 2024—all drastically below inflation levels! Such is the fraudulent character of these demonstrations that they are actively being encouraged by the PSOE-Podemos government. In the words of Podemos leader, deputy prime minister and labour minister Yolanda Díaz, the unions "have every reason to take to the streets to mobilise against the bosses."

The calculations behind these protests, supported by pseudo-left tendencies like CRT, is to maintain the union stranglehold over the working class and block opposition to Podemos, freeing the ruling class to wage war on Russia in Ukraine and enforce deep attacks on workers' living standards.

Immense social anger is building against the government. In the last six months, workers on strike and work hours lost due to labour disputes have increased by 150 percent compared to the same period last year, with more than half a million strikers and almost 20 million hours of work lost.

An indication of what UGT and CCOO fear is the mass strike wave of British workers against the deepest collapse of living standards since the Great Depression. Over 200,000 postal and rail workers are fighting against employers who are enforcing massively below-inflation pay deals and attacks on conditions and pension rights. They have been at the centre of a summer strike wave that began in June and included telecoms, bus workers, dockers, local government staff and barristers.

Citing Britain, Mariano Hoya, UGT's vice-secretary of union policy, told *Huffington Post*, "Wherever there is a capacity for mobilisation there will be conflicts."

"In Spain it will begin to happen," he predicted, specifying that the unions do not rule out a "contagion effect" among different sectors of workers. "[T]he powder keg is there," he added, specifying that "when a powerful sector comes in, as happened with the metal strike in Cádiz, it generates media visibility, provoking an immediate contagion effect to other sectors."

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for building rank-and-file committees to unite workers in Spain, Britain and internationally to build a powerful organization, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), to struggle against war and inflation. Building such a movement requires a political break with petty-bourgeois groups like the CRT and *I*zquierda Diario and the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Spain and internationally.

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