

Strikes erupt after the formation of new PSOE-Sumar government

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A new wave of strikes has erupted across Spain after the installation of the new, pro-war, pro-austerity government of the social democratic Socialist Party (PSOE) and Sumar, a coalition of pseudo-left and Stalinist parties.

Over 30 different sectors including healthcare, education, transport, fire services, logistics, mining, oil, aeronautics, metalworks, auxiliary car industries and sanitation, among others, are affected.

The strikes show the determination of hundreds of thousands of workers in Spain and all over the world to end the crippling cuts to their standard of living, but also prove they cannot defend their interests while subject to the control of the bureaucratic cliques running the trade unions, linked to parties like the PSOE and Sumar, that police the class struggle on behalf of the corporations.

On Monday, 1,500 workers at Amazon's logistics centre in Dos Hermanas, Seville, southern Spain, began an indefinite strike to demand better wages and conditions. The strike is being followed by 90 percent of the workforce according to the trade unions, the social democratic General Workers Union (UGT) and the Sumar-aligned Workers Commissions (CCOO). Workers earning an average of only 1,400 euros a month are trying to secure pay parity with other centres, where wages average 2,000 euros. In addition, they are demanding better overtime compensation and that holidays be counted as weekly rest.

Dos Hermanas is one of Amazon's most modern logistics centres in Spain. Fully robotized, it began operating in September 2020 and covers an area of almost 180,000 square meters, 26 football fields. It has a storage capacity of 25 million products and an average of 450,000 units are prepared every day.

In the north eastern region of Catalonia, 55,000 nurses have been on indefinite strike since last week. They are protesting an agreement signed between the regional Catalan government and the UGT and CCOO which does

not increase their wages or recognize their professional category.

Despite the fact that the strike has only been called by the sector's minority unions and that draconian minimum service levels have been imposed by the regional Catalan government, of up to 100 percent in some positions, large numbers of workers are taking part, with a large demonstration of thousands of nurses held on December 15.

Regular strikes have broken out in the health sector throughout the year in different regions and affecting doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, reflecting the deterioration of public healthcare under austerity. The unions, however, have deliberately isolated these struggles and refused to call for a unified action across the country.

Last week, 9,000 workers from Technological company, a subsidiary providing computer services to the consulting firm Accenture, also went on strike. In some centres 100 percent of staff participated. Workers are demanding higher wages.

According to the unions, the workforce has lost purchasing power equivalent to 58 days of work in the last three years. Meanwhile, the members of the company's board of directors have raised their salaries by 36 percent. The consulting sector is known for its heavy exploitation of workers, pressured to meet stringent deadlines.

In the airline industry, 3,000 ground service workers for Iberia, the flag carrier of Spain, part of International Airlines Group, went on strike in eight airports across the country. They are demanding an end to sub-contracting to other companies, which frequently means a worsening of their working conditions.

In Correos, the state-owned company responsible for providing postal services, workers have been called out on strike for December 29. Repeated strikes at the company

have taken place in recent years in pursuit of better working conditions.

These are just some of the strikes that are affecting hundreds of thousands of workers, but there are many others including at private schools across the Basque Country; garbage collectors in Coruña; recreational and betting machines company Operibérica in Getafe; induction hobs and ovens company BHS-Balay in Zaragoza; footwear company Pablosky in Toledo; automotive component company Airtel in Zaragoza; and steel company Comforsa, the largest industrial company owned by the Catalan government.

Underlying these strikes are the high levels of inflation that have sunk real wages in the last three years, plus long-term precariousness and poor working conditions. Real wages in Spain fell 5.3 percent between 2019 and 2022.

Last year saw the highest number of strikes since 2012, the year of an explosion of industrial disputes following the Egyptian Revolution and European Union-wide austerity in the aftermath of 2008 global financial crisis.

The trend accelerated in 2023, with a 21 percent increase in the number of strikes compared to the same period in 2022. This came to a partial halt with this year's general elections in the month of June, the subsequent negotiations to form a new government and summer holidays.

Now, spurred by the arrival of Christmas, a very important period for business activity in key sectors of the Spanish economy such as hospitality and transport, workers are once again fighting against poverty wages, below-inflation increases and deteriorating working conditions. Similar actions are taking place throughout Europe and the world, mobilizing workers who face not only police repression but also the trade union bureaucracy which is actively collaborating with companies to suppress, exhaust and derail these struggles.

Although across 2023 headline inflation is only expected to reach just over 3 percent, this data does not reflect the daily reality facing the working class. Food prices have risen by 9 percent, transportation by 5.2 percent and clothing by 4.5 percent, while the wage agreements signed by the trade unions meant an average salary increase of 3.49 percent.

Basic products are increasingly becoming a luxury, such as olive oil—a staple of the Spanish diet—the price of which has increased by 66.7 percent in one year; rice, with an increase of 17 percent; and legumes and vegetables, 16.8 percent.

Added to this is the fact that housing costs are still

completely out of control. Rent for a 60-square-metre home in Madrid represents 112 percent of the minimum wage.

Regarding working conditions, according to a report published this year by the Ministry of Labor, 46.9 percent of workers (8.1 million) are in precarious employment. Adding the unemployed and precarious self-employed brings the total to 11.9 million people. These workers suffer enormously, with the report estimating that in 2020, 170,000 of the 500,000 diagnosed cases of depression (34 percent) came down to precarious employment.

The eruption of a new strike wave poses the need to break with the trade union bureaucracy, which does not serve the interests of workers but stands in alliance with the PSOE-Sumar government against them. They are determined, in the cause of global competitiveness, to inflict a defeat on every struggle mounted by workers through a combination of bureaucratic betrayal, savage police repression and draconian minimum services laws.

The strikes take place against the backdrop of a global upsurge of the class struggle all over the world, directed against the efforts of the ruling classes to slash workers' wages, living standards and benefits to pay for NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza—part of a military escalation throughout the Middle East—and a massive programme of arms spending.

For workers to fight back, they must coordinate their struggles across different workplaces, industries and countries in opposition to the divide and rule tactics of the corporatist unions. This means building new rank-and-file committees to unify and mobilise the collective social power of the international working class.



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