

Spain's trade unions and pseudo-left approve allowing workers to retire at 72

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Spanish workers will now be able to delay their legal retirement beyond the age of 67, following the approval of a new law by the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government, with backing from the right-wing Popular Party (PP). The reform allows employees to voluntarily continue working until 72 while gradually receiving a percentage of their pension, starting at 45 percent in the first year and increasing to 100 percent by the final year.

The law has also been approved by the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations and the major trade unions: Sumar-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT).

The goal is to extend the working life of Spanish workers in line with European Union directives. In 2011, the PSOE government, then ruling alone, raised the retirement age from 65 to 67. Now the PSOE-Sumar government aims to further reduce pension spending, redirecting funds toward areas such as military expenditure, while ensuring a large pool of cheap labour remains available to employers.

The normalisation of working beyond 70 opens the door to making that age mandatory rather than optional in the future. The Círculo de Empresarios, a business organisation representing CEOs from Spain's largest corporations, called for this before the elections. Now, PSOE and Sumar are taking the first step.

Low-wage workers, who receive the lowest pensions, will be most affected. Currently, 42 percent of Spanish retirees—4.16 million out of a total of 9.73 million—are considered poor, receiving pensions below the poverty threshold (€846.95). Including those earning less than the €1,080 minimum wage, this figure rises to 56 percent, adding another 1.32 million pensioners.

This is under conditions where public services, such

as healthcare, are deteriorating, forcing many workers to seek solutions in the private sector, while access to housing is becoming a luxury.

The PSOE-Sumar government boasts of having raised the minimum wage by 26 percent since 2019, surpassing the 18 percent inflation rate. The reality is quite different: the prices of essential goods, which make up most of workers' consumption, have risen much more.

Between 2019 and 2024, food prices increased by an average of 34 percent, while housing prices have risen by 45.8 percent for new properties and 27.1 percent for second-hand ones. The government also intends to require the lowest wage earners to pay income tax, from which they were previously exempt.

Many workers reaching retirement age will be forced to continue working. For the first time in decades, it will become common again for people over 70 to be working. These workers are often in physically demanding jobs. Many already suffer from serious health issues by the time they reach 67, and working beyond that point pushes them to exhaustion, reducing life expectancy. The message of the trade unions, social democrats and pseudo-left is clear—work until you die.

Both Sumar and the right-wing Popular Party have used the same excuse to justify voting in favour of this law without admitting its consequences: the support of the unions.

The leader of the Popular Party, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, stated that the prior agreement between the business platforms and the major unions is "sufficient endorsement for the PP to support this royal decree-law."

Sumar spokesperson Ernest Urtasun declared that "this pension agreement stems from social dialogue, and as you know, we always respect agreements

reached within the framework of social dialogue.”

Spanish trade unions have played a key role in approving cuts against workers for decades. However, they were often forced to organise mobilisations to release pressure. In 2011, when the retirement age was raised to 67, the resulting discontent forced them to call a general strike. Mass support for the strike only pushed the unions to betray workers faster. Instead of calling for further action, they called them off.

Now, increasingly embedded in the capitalist apparatus of austerity and war, they not only refuse to oppose attacks on workers but are their chief promoters—guaranteeing their capitalist masters the suppression of class struggle. For the first time, the unions CCOO and UGT have signed an agreement—with the Madrid regional government—committing to “not promoting strikes, protests, demonstrations, campaigns, or any other form of collective conflict.”

For now, the agreement affects only public sector workers in Madrid (around 40,000), but it sets a dangerous precedent: the legal prohibition of workplace protests, a policy that would meet the expectations of any fascist party.

The pseudo-left Sumar and the unions are part of a bloc that, like in other imperialist powers, promotes austerity at home and war abroad. The same applies to Podemos, which was in government until 2023 and later split into Sumar.

Over the years, Podemos and Sumar, backed by the unions, have supported wage increases below inflation for broad sections of workers and a labour law reform that weakens workplace protections. They have done nothing to prevent the deterioration of underfunded and overstretched public education and healthcare systems, accelerating their path to privatisation. They have approved pension reforms that pave the way for their gradual privatisation.

Meanwhile, Spain’s military spending has skyrocketed. According to a report by the Grupo Antimilitarista Tortuga published on 31 December 2024, Spain’s actual military expenditure exceeds €60 billion—more than 5 percent of GDP. This sharply contrasts with the government’s official claim that defence spending accounts for just 1 percent of GDP, or around €14 billion, plus an additional €2 billion for special armament programmes. The report highlights

that this discrepancy stems from military-related expenses spread across different ministries and off-budget transfers.

Workers will gain nothing from negotiations between the PSOE-Sumar government, the unions, and business elites. They must unite around a revolutionary socialist programme to redirect the billions handed to the capitalists and military expenditures instead towards improving public services and the living conditions of workers and pensioners.



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