

Spanish metal strike in Cantabria grows, Cádiz workers to strike next week

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5 June 2025

Cantabria's metal industry is facing its most powerful strike in recent memory, as thousands of workers continue their strike for a second consecutive day. An industrial standstill is hitting small and large companies alike, and sub-contractors, and may evolve into an indefinite strike if no resolution is achieved in mediation talks Friday. Moreover, 27,000 metalworkers in Cádiz are set to strike next week, while strike action is being prepared at Navantia shipyards in Cartagena, Spain's largest military-industrial enterprise.

The strike in Cantabria, called by the CCOO, UGT, and USO union federations, has seen a significant uptick in both picket activity and worker turnout compared to the first day. The participation rate, which unions place at around 95 percent, forced the closure of a wide range of companies, including those with their own collective bargaining agreements.

Firms like Global Steel Wire, Teknia, Solvay, and Sidenor shuttered operations, some not because of direct involvement in the dispute, but as subcontracted staff did not report for work. As the strike continued, traffic disruptions spread across the region, with roads blocked and pickets active at nearly every major industrial access point. Barricades and burning tires were reported in Santander, Guarnizo, Reinosa, and Ampuero, monitored by riot police.

At the Candina industrial estate, a truck was used to block a major intersection, while bonfires burned near traffic roundabouts. Major bus lines in Santander had to be rerouted or suspended due to access problems at their bases.

The roots of the strike go beyond the employers' latest attempt to impose a below-inflation wage deal and claw back existing gains such as vacation pay improvements and night shift bonuses. Fundamentally, it is a response to the betrayal of the 2022 metalworkers' strike by the union apparatus. Workers are currently demanding a modest 3.5

percent wage increase, already far below the real rise in living costs—yet even this limited demand, set by the unions themselves, is rejected by the employers.

In 2022, after 21 days of strikes by tens of thousands of workers, the unions called off the walkout and signed a sellout deal imposing below-inflation wage increases. The strike had culminated in the largest demonstration in Cantabria's capital, Santander, in decades, on June 15, 2022, with mass support from the city's working population. But the union bureaucracies ultimately demobilised the movement, handing victory to the employers, sowing anger at their suppression of militant opposition and their enforcement of the Pymetal employer federation's demands.

Today, the union leadership is following the same playbook as 2022: isolate the struggle, stage a controlled strike, and tie workers to backroom negotiations with Pymetal through the Agency for the Extrajudicial Resolution of Labor Conflicts (ORECLA), a regional mediation body.

The next meeting is scheduled for today, and unions have already warned that if no deal is reached, the strike will become indefinite starting Monday, June 9.

During Tuesday's action, César Conde, General Secretary of the Federation of Industry at CCOO, urged increased turnout for the strike but refused to call on 306,000 metal workers across Spain, let alone workers from other sectors, to join the fight. "We need more people to join the pickets," he said. "Thanks to them and the workers who have backed the strike, many companies, both large and small, have not opened their doors today." Though CCOO is the largest union in the sector, it still refuses to expand the struggle beyond Cantabria.

Now, metalworkers in Cádiz province are preparing for a renewed confrontation with the metal employers' federation, FEMCA. CCOO and UGT have announced strike actions for June 17 and 18, with the potential for an

indefinite strike beginning June 23 if no agreement is reached.

The dispute centers on stalled negotiations of a new provincial collective agreement, after the previous deal expired in December 2023. At the heart of the workers' demands is the elimination of the dual wage system, which excludes workers hired after 2014 from receiving the toxic work bonus, resulting in pay disparities of up to €180 per month for workers in the same jobs. Workers are also demanding regulation and protections for permanent seasonal workers, as well as retroactive wage increases linked to inflation, effective from January 1, 2024.

These demands reflect growing anger over deepening exploitation and the unions' past complicity. FEMCA claims to have offered a 3 percent raise for 2024 and 2.8 percent for 2025, but workers see this as far short of their core demands.

In 2021, strikers met with state repression, including armored vehicles and riot police deployed by the PSOE–Podemos government. That strike was ultimately shut down by the same union bureaucracies now posturing as leaders of the fight, who in Cantabria agreed to wage increases below inflation.

Simultaneously, workers' anger is growing in Cartagena at Navantia shipyards, one of Spain's key state-owned companies. Navantia specialises in building warships and submarines, most notably the S-80 Plus class, and employs around 5,000 workers directly, with its operations supporting over 27,000 jobs nationally. In the region of Murcia, Navantia accounts for 10 percent of industrial employment.

Despite its military-strategic importance and generous public funding, workers at the Cartagena shipyard and those employed by auxiliary firms are facing worsening conditions. The heavy use of subcontracting, unequal pay, and lack of protections for auxiliary workers have provoked rising anger. Joint protests mobilizing both direct and auxiliary staff have begun, demanding job security and dignified conditions.

The metalworkers of Cantabria, Cádiz, and Cartagena are not only confronting the regional employers' federations and the treacherous manoeuvres of the union bureaucracy. They also face the full force of the PSOE–Sumar government, which has shown time and again that it will not hesitate to deploy riot police and repression to defend the profits of major corporations.

But beyond Spain's borders, this growing wave of industrial militancy runs directly against the agenda of the European Union, which is carrying out the largest

rearmament programme since the 1930s. Navantia and the entire metal industry in Spain and across Europe are a central pillar of this war machine, producing submarines, warships, and naval systems key to NATO's expanding military build-up.

The employers, union federations, the Spanish state and the EU all agree on one aim: to prevent any disruption to the rearmament program. They are determined to keep workers' demands for decent wages and secure jobs from interfering with their war economy. Wage struggles will thus evolve ever more rapidly into a political confrontation with the militarist and austerity priorities of the European ruling class.

That is why the union bureaucracies isolate every strike, narrowing demands, and negotiating sellouts behind closed doors. Even a limited victory by workers would show that the billions flowing to war could go to wages, pensions, schools, healthcare, and key infrastructure.

The natural allies of Spanish workers are not the corrupt union leaderships or the pro-war parties in Madrid and Brussels, including Sumar and Podemos. They are workers across Europe, those in France, Germany, Italy, UK and beyond, who also face rising prices, stagnant wages, and collapsing public services while their governments pour resources into the machinery of death.

What is urgently required is a conscious break from the union bureaucracies and the building of new, independent rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, to unify these struggles across sectors, regions, and borders. These committees can form the foundation for a political counteroffensive by the working class, uniting workers not only to fight austerity and exploitation, but capitalism's descent into genocide and war.



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