

26,000 Cádiz metalworkers set to strike in Spain

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Barely a week has passed since Spain's main trade union federations shut down the metalworkers' strike in Cantabria and a new eruption of the class struggle is underway.

On June 18 and 19, over 26,000 metalworkers in the province of Cádiz are on strike. The walkout, called by Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the General Union of Workers (UGT), is the latest expression of the explosive anger building up in Spain's industrial working class. It is part of a broader strike wave as workers fight to claw back wages gutted through years of below inflation pay, soaring housing costs, and rising food prices.

The Cádiz strike aims to force a new collective agreement with the Federation of Metal Companies of the Province of Cádiz (Femca), replacing the one imposed in 2021. Union demands include regulation of "discontinuous permanent" contracts, improved sick leave, and wage indexation to inflation backdated to 1 January 2024 through 2026. No wage increases above inflation are being proposed.

One key demand is the reinstatement of the toxic work bonus for all workers. This was eliminated from the agreement in 2013, with union approval, during negotiations amid a deep crisis in the sector. Though raised again in 2021, the unions once more dropped it. Workers denounce the result: a "two tier wage system," with pre 2014 hires receiving the bonus, while newer workers, despite holding the same roles, are denied it.

If no deal is reached, the strike will escalate into an indefinite walkout from June 23.

The agreement affects thousands of small and medium subcontractors tied to giants like Navantia, Airbus, Acerinox, and Dragados. It covers about 17,000 permanent and up to 9,000 temporary workers across 3,500 companies. Also involved are workers in micro and small firms in metal carpentry, plumbing, air conditioning, and car repair shops. All face low pay,

precarious contracts, and agreements routinely violated with impunity.

This strike is a devastating indictment of the trade union sellout of the 2021 strike. For nine days, workers shut down production with near total participation, blocked roads, and faced police repression. Working-class neighbourhoods erupted in solidarity, with nightly pot-banging protests, banners on balconies, and spontaneous demonstrations.

Terrified that this militancy would inspire workers nationwide, the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government—in which current Sumar leader Yolanda Díaz served as Labour Minister, a role she continues today—responded with brute force. Hundreds of riot police and armoured vehicles were deployed in working-class areas to crush the strike. As momentum built, CCOO and UGT intervened to strangle the movement, signing a backroom deal with employers that marked a total betrayal.

The deal locked in a real wage cut of 7 to 8 percent and failed to address any of the sector's structural issues: precariousness, unchecked subcontracting, hazardous work, long hours, and extreme labour flexibility.

Even the terms in the miserable collective agreement are widely ignored by employers. A core demand of 2021 was enforcement of basic rights. Yet the unions made sure no monitoring mechanisms were introduced. To this day, they turn a blind eye to violations, acting as enforcers of corporate rule.

The result has been catastrophic. By July 2022, *Público* reported that between 2,000 and 5,000 Cádiz metalworkers had been forced to emigrate. One described linking contracts lasting just days, working 12-hour shifts for a full month without rest.

"There is never any control over overtime," he said. "That is the reality for 60 percent of the metalworkers in the Bay of Cádiz." Another explained, "You either accept

wage theft or leave. If you demand your rights, they tell you there are sixty others waiting to replace you.” He concluded, “CCOO and UGT are bought off. They side with the employers.”

While union demands in 2025 remain far below what was lost since 2021 or never won in 2021, the conditions for a serious struggle are far more favourable. Workload is near full capacity, unlike in 2021 when COVID-19 still limited industrial activity. Companies like Navantia and Dragados Offshore are expanding, backed by state investment under the PSOE Sumar government’s rearmament programme.

But to advance the fight, workers must draw the lessons of 2021 and the recent sellout in Cantabria. There, the unions shut down a powerful movement by imposing a new agreement offering wage increases slightly above inflation. The aim was to shut down the strike before it could catalyse a broader, coordinated mobilisation with workers in Cádiz and the 20,000 metalworkers in Cartagena entering negotiations, and intersecting with rising discontent in A Coruña and the Navantia shipyards.

Moreover, the metal sector is only one front in a broader national wave of class struggle: 9,500 workers at the energy giant Iberdrola are striking; doctors and EasyJet flight crews are mobilising nationwide for better salaries and working conditions; teachers in Asturias are demanding improved wages; and workers at the supermarket chain Alcampo and at Caixabank are fighting against job cuts.

A unified struggle would directly threaten the PSOE Sumar government’s militarist agenda, heavily reliant on the metal sector. It would confront a deeply unpopular administration besieged by corruption scandals and mounting working-class resistance to years of austerity and wage erosion.

This is why the unions, rewarded with a record €32 million in public funds by the PSOE-Sumar government in 2025, are isolating each struggle, wearing down resistance, and ensuring workers negotiate from a position of weakness. They function as labour police, tasked with suppressing the class struggle.

For many workers, the treacherous role of CCOO and UGT is clear. This is why rank-and-file workers founded the Metalworkers Coordinator (CTM) in 2020 as an alternative. CTM has supported the strike while warning that “what is on the table is insufficient, but worse still is all that is not even being negotiated.”

Their statement denounces longstanding abuses ignored

by the unions: exploitative “discontinuous permanent” contracts, forced overtime under threat of dismissal, violations of rest days, and work during summer heatwaves. They condemn the parallel subcontracts for cleaners and scaffolders, which fragment the workforce and offer worse conditions.

CTM insists that the workers’ assembly—not backroom deals—must be the centre of decision making. “As we did in 2021,” they write, “we call on all workers to strike for what is and what is not on the table, but weighs heavily on the backs of those of us who suffer the metal in real life. On Wednesday, we return to the barricades until we win both what is on the table and what is not.”

However, for workers to decide what is on the table and what is not they must take the struggle into their own hands by building rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade union bureaucracy. Through these committees, workers can take control of the strike, formulate their own demands—including wage increases above inflation, secure contracts, safe working conditions, and an end to subcontracting—and coordinate a common offensive across the metal sector and the wider working class.

The CTM denounces the union bureaucracy, but like the unions confines the struggle to Cádiz. Independent, democratic organs of rank-and-file workers can unite metalworkers across companies, contracts, and roles, and forge links with other workers across Spain and internationally.

Such a movement must be armed with a political perspective. The fight for decent conditions, wages, and rights cannot be waged in isolation from the broader struggle against capitalism. The metalworkers’ struggle is a direct clash with the PSOE-Sumar government’s programme of war and austerity, funded through cuts and repression at home.

To defeat this offensive, workers must fight for socialism: the democratic control and public ownership of the major metal firms, shipyards, banks, and corporations, and the organisation of production based on human need, not private profit.



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