

Spanish unions impose sellout contract on Cádiz metalworkers strike

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On July 8, the minority CGT and CTM metalworkers' unions in Cádiz announced the end of strike action in the province; action which had begun on June 18. Both unions had maintained the strike after its betrayal by the General Union of Workers (UGT), which—with the tacit support of the Workers' Commissions (CC.OO.) union—signed a sellout agreement with the employers' association FEMCA. The settlement attacks working conditions and is already being described by workers as “the worst agreement in history.”

Workers will not recover the wages lost in recent years and could wind up losing even more money, depending on inflation. Training contracts will have lower pay, and there is still no regularization of conditions for intermittent permanent workers, who will continue to have no job security. It will take years to recover the hazard pay bonus, with no clear criteria as to when it will be granted. There are no guarantees that companies will not ignore the few commitments that they have made—as they have done in the past.

The agreement is to remain in effect until 2031—meaning that for seven years metalworkers in Cádiz will be unable to strike against these conditions. Once again, the rule holds true: when working class struggles remain under the control of the union bureaucracies, they end up being betrayed.

The metals sector is crucial to the plans of the NATO alliance and Spanish imperialism, which, through the PSOE (Socialist Party)-Sumar government, has approved an increase in military spending to 2.1 percent of GDP, with further increases in coming years. This will require a drastic escalation of austerity measures against workers in Spain.

In this strike, the workers not only confronted the metal employers in Cádiz. Spanish imperialism and its

government needed, on the one hand, for the metal sector to continue operating smoothly and at minimal cost, and on the other, to prevent the metalworkers' struggle in Cádiz from spreading across Spain and internationally. It assigned the task of ensuring this to the union bureaucracies.

The social-democratic UGT, the majority union, rushed to sign a treacherous agreement on June 23 to prevent the strike from becoming indefinite that day. However, workers rejected that agreement in assemblies, forcing UGT to continue the strike. On June 26, UGT signed the final agreement—with minimal changes from the original—continuing to sell out the workers to the interests of the employers and of Spanish imperialism.

This time, the UGT did not even bother to convene assemblies of the rank and file to vote on the agreement.

In betraying the workers, the UGT had the support of the Stalinist CC.OO., the other major union in the industry in Cádiz. Knowing that their votes were not necessary to approve the contract, since UGT was the majority, CC.OO bureaucrats claimed they did not support it. However, they said they would not continue the strike either, but that they might file legal challenges against parts of the contract at some point in the future.

Sold out by the major unions, many workers who intended to continue fighting pressured the smaller unions CGT and CTM to keep the strike going. However, these two unions did so only in order to let the strike die out.

The workers' resistance in Cádiz led the PSOE-Sumar government to launch repression even harsher than that during the 2021 strike by the PSOE government and its pseudo-left partner at the time,

Podemos. In 2021, hundreds of police officers attacked strikers, including with armored vehicles.

This time, beyond attacks on pickets and demonstrations, PSOE-Sumar government cops treated the workers of Cádiz as terrorists. They launched Operation Fire, which is still ongoing and has already led to the arrest of 23 workers accused of public disorder and assault on authority. Four of them could face imprisonment if €90,000 bail is not paid. Police even arrested a worker in Madrid traveling with his wife on their honeymoon to Cuba, falsely accusing him of attempting to flee.

A CTM union member told the digital outlet *El Salto*: “They have started arresting comrades just as people have begun working again, some of whom only participated on June 18; this is clear repression. This time they didn’t send armored vehicles, but repression is harsher than during the 2021 strike.”

Six members of the anarchist CNT union have been imprisoned for picketing in front of a bakery to defend the rights of a pregnant worker. This marks the first imprisonment for non-violent trade union activity since the fall of Spain’s fascist Franco dictatorship.

This intensification of repression is no coincidence; it is part of a broader plan by Spanish capitalism and imperialism, carried out through the PSOE-Sumar government and the entire state apparatus, to attack and suppress workers’ struggles. It is their response to a rising wave of class struggle, which they seek to contain and strangle, as seen in strikes like those in the metal sector in Cantabria and Cádiz, the public healthcare doctors’ strike, or the first strike in the 100-year history of Spain’s Iberdrola electric company.

Winning the Cádiz strike would have required an independent political perspective and organization. The workers involved had to be united with other metalworkers and other sectors of the working class across Spain and internationally, as part of the independent mobilization of rank-and-file workers’ opposition to European militarism and austerity.

Days before the Cádiz strike, a metalworkers strike began in Cantabria and, simultaneously, in the Murcian city of Cartagena. On July 10, a strike began in Cádiz’s mass transit. The CGT and CTM did not even consider the possibility of uniting these struggles and, from there, opposing the sellout contract and state repression of strikes. They simply did nothing—thus letting

workers gradually withdraw, demoralizing them and finally calling off the strike.

In their final statement calling off the strike, the CGT union proposed to “work company by company to try to improve the labor and social conditions of the sector’s workforce.” This means further isolating workers, dividing them company by company among the 5,000 metal firms of various kinds that exist in Cádiz.

This sellout was not inevitable. The experience in Cádiz again shows that workers want to fight, but are constrained by union bureaucracies that either directly betray them or isolate and exhaust their struggles. For these struggles to succeed, workers must free themselves from the union bureaucracies and organize independently. The vast untapped opposition that exists to austerity and imperialist war in Spain and across Europe must be mobilized and organized, firstly in independent committees of rank-and-file workers.

Rank-and-file committees are independent structures formed to defend workers’ democracy by connecting workers from different companies, sectors and countries in their struggles. They seek to transfer power to the rank and file, providing a forum for deliberation and planning of collective action.

This is the necessary path for workers to take control of strikes and other struggles out of the hands of the union bureaucracies, coordinate opposition to maneuvers by management and the union tops and to state repression, and coordinate with other layers of workers entering into struggle. Such committees also provide a key mechanism for the development of a socialist and internationalist political struggle against NATO and the PSOE-Sumar government, whose policies of militarism and austerity underlie the relentless attacks on the working class.



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