

4 construction workers die in Madrid construction site collapse

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On October 7, a building undergoing renovation in central Madrid to be converted into a luxury hotel collapsed, burying and killing four of the workers.

The deceased included the site manager, Spanish national Laura Rodríguez, and three migrant workers: Moussa Dembelé (from Mali), Jorge Velazquez (from Ecuador), and Diallo Mamadún Alpha (from Guinea). Workers like these are the ones targeted by the fascist party Vox, which calls for their expulsion from Spain if they fail to integrate, or whom the PSOE-Podemos government described to NATO in 2022 as a “hybrid threat” against which it deploys the military along African borders.

The reality is that in Spain, they represent the most vulnerable and unprotected sector of the working class, the cannon fodder exploited by business owners.

There had been many warnings beforehand that the building could become a death trap. It had received an “unfavorable” technical inspection dated March 8, 2022, concerning the “general condition of façades, exterior walls, and party walls,” as well as the “maintenance of roofs and terraces.” Nonetheless, the Madrid City Council, governed by the right-wing Popular Party, had granted the permit to carry out the renovation works.

That permit was no coincidence either. The building had been acquired by the Saudi fund RSR Singular Assets Europe SOCIMI to be converted into a luxury hotel with 122 rooms. It was the first of 18 luxury accommodations that the fund planned to build in Madrid between 2026 and 2028. Wealth and luxury for the millionaires were paid for with workers’ lives.

This is not a situation unique to Madrid. The tourism boom in Spain is driving a parallel surge in the construction of tourist accommodations and hotels, with 775 new developments projected by 2028.

Alongside this, residential housing construction has grown by 7.5 percent compared to last year so far, fueled by rising property prices—a consequence of both tourism and speculation by landlords and investment funds.

One study found, “This rush to complete construction projects as quickly as possible is leading to increased work pace and longer hours, further exploiting workers while safety measures are removed to save time and cut costs. As a result, 103 construction workers died between January and July, a 26% increase compared to the previous year.”

The unions acknowledge this wave of deaths as they stand aside and watch it unfold. According to Pilar Ituero, Secretary of Occupational Health at UGT, a union aligned with the PSOE, “Our impression is that there tends to be a parallel pattern between construction productivity and accident rates. The more work is done, the more pressure is placed on employees, and the more deaths occur.”

Daniel Barragán from CC OO, a union close to the government partners Podemos and Sumar, similarly stated: “Speeding up work rhythms, as many companies are demanding, leads to deaths. That always comes at the expense of safety.”

The workplace carnage is not limited to the construction sector. In 2024 in Spain, 796 workers died and 628,300 work-related accidents with injuries were recorded, of which 5,596 were classified as serious. As of August this year, 489 workers have already died. In reality, these figures are significantly higher, as they do not account for deaths that occur after the initial accident.

But the slaughter does not end there. In 2024, Spain recorded 26,803 occupational diseases, or work-related illnesses. This figure is believed to be far lower than the

real number, as cases are managed by Mutuas, private healthcare companies that collaborate with the public health system and aim to reduce sick leave and save money for employers. In 2024, only 106 cases of occupational cancer were officially diagnosed in Spain. However, estimates suggest that there are over 16,000 new cases annually and more than 6,000 deaths from work-related cancer.

Incurable diseases like silicosis, once thought to be eradicated, have resurfaced in recent years. Since 2007, 5,900 workers in Spain have contracted this illness, with 520 new cases reported in 2024. The resurgence is linked to the handling of quartz agglomerates, especially in the production of kitchen countertops. Despite this alarming reality, neither the PSOE, Podemos government nor the current PSOE, Sumar coalition has banned these materials or taken meaningful action to address the disease. Nor have the unions exerted any pressure in defense of these workers, or in truth, of any others.

Following the deaths in Madrid, they were forced to offer some kind of response and called a rally in front of the employers' association headquarters. These types of gatherings are designed so that only union delegates, the middle layers of the union bureaucracy, attend, ensuring the lowest possible public impact.

In response to last year's death toll, the unions did not call for any strike or mobilization to demand an end to the extreme exploitation of workers—let alone question the capitalist model that ultimately causes these deaths. Their only response was to submit requests to the PSOE-Sumar government and to the companies, asking for improved monitoring of workplace risks, requests that have already proven useless.

The PSOE and its pseudo-left ally Sumar refuse to take action. Their Minister of Labour is Yolanda Díaz, a former Stalinist and current leader of Sumar, who already held the position during the PSOE-Podemos government and now serves as Second Vice President. After the 2024 death toll became public, Díaz cynically stated: “I take this opportunity to address all social agents, employers, and workers, to say that all possible prevention is what avoids the outcomes we are discussing today.”

Díaz does not criticize the brutal exploitation workers endure or the pressure for speed-up. For the past 20

months, her ministry and the unions have been negotiating with employers over a new occupational risk prevention law. However, even if such a law were to be finally adopted, the Ministry of Labour lacks the inspectors needed to enforce it.

This form of social murder—workplace deaths—occurs all over the world, as shown by the death of 16 workers in a munitions plant in Tennessee. It is an endemic evil of capitalism that neither employers nor their governments will resolve, only the workers themselves can.

As the WSWS pointed out in response to the Tennessee massacre, it is necessary to form “Rank-and-file safety committees, organized independently by workers themselves, to take control of workplace safety, demand full transparency in investigations, and link up with other sections of workers across industries and states to build a unified network of rank-and-file committees capable of asserting democratic control over working conditions and prioritizing the lives of all workers over profit.”



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