

Calls mount for rail strike after 42 die in high-speed train crash in Adamuz, Spain

Alex Lantier
21 January 2026

At least 42 people are dead after a horrific train collision near the town of Adamuz on Sunday night, around 7:45 p.m. As anger mounts among workers who have long warned of poor maintenance and underfunding of rail security amid the rail privatization program overseen by Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government, train drivers are calling for strikes.

The accident occurred when the rear carriages of a high-speed train of the private Italian firm Iryo, traveling north from Málaga to Madrid, derailed on a straight stretch of track. It crossed onto an adjacent rail line and smashed into the front of an Alvia train of Spanish state operator Renfe going south from Madrid to Huelva. With both trains reportedly traveling around 205 km/h (127 mph), the Renfe train's lead carriages derailed and crashed down a 4-meter embankment.

Rescuers worked under floodlights in the hilly rural area around Adamuz, to rescue survivors and retrieve bodies from the twisted wreckage of the train. Over 150 people were injured, with 12 in critical care, while bodies were still being found Monday night as the death toll mounted to 42, including the 28-year-old driver of the Renfe train.

Anger among rail workers and the general public grew after news emerged that a trainee train driver had died in another derailment in Gelida, near Barcelona, when a commuter train collided with a retaining wall that had collapsed onto the tracks.

Tuesday morning, the Spanish Union of Rail Machinists (SEMAF) union was compelled to issue a strike call. Criticizing the "relentless deterioration of train materiel," it called to "guarantee the safety and reliability of the network." Claiming that its strike call aimed to "give legal authorization to mobilizations by working people," it stressed the "criminal responsibility of persons tasked with guaranteeing the security of rail infrastructure."

While individual officials may well be criminally liable for their role in the catastrophe, it must be bluntly stated

that such crimes flowed from the right-wing policies of the PSOE-Podemos and then Podemos-Sumar governments. Relentlessly diverting funds to rail privatization, the military, and the enrichment of Spain's capitalist oligarchy, they starved the railways of necessary maintenance. This created the conditions for catastrophes like the Adamuz collision.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez (PSOE) traveled to Adamuz, where he claimed that his government would be honest with the public about the causes of the accident. "We are all asking ourselves how this can have happened, what happened. We will find the truth," he said. "When we discover it, we will inform the public with full transparency. I can guarantee the victims that we will protect them and assist them as long as is necessary."

Podemos, the Stalinist-Pabloite party that governed for four years in alliance with the PSOE and whose Sumar faction is still in government, made similar points. In a brief statement on Adamuz, Podemos organization secretary and national co-spokesperson Pablo Fernández thanked the "tireless" work of rescue teams, adding: "We hope that the causes of this terrible accident will be clarified as soon as possible and that at all times there will be the best possible transparency."

But despite all the promises of "transparency" from the PSOE and Podemos, they are covering up the causes of the catastrophe and their own responsibility for it.

On Monday, Transport Minister Oscar Puente declared that the accident was "strange, very strange, it is currently difficult to explain ... Currently we cannot speculate on whether the fault is with the rolling stock or the rails. We do not know." He added: "Concretely, work on interchanges on this part of the track ended in May. Given this, the accident, on a straight portion of the track, is extremely strange ... We hope the investigation can help us clarify what took place."

Puente's arguments are absurd lies in defense of his

government's privatization agenda. While both the trains and the rail infrastructure clearly remain to be fully investigated, workers had repeatedly warned that the track where the accident occurred was poorly maintained and dangerous.

The Madrid-Andalucia high-speed rail line is Spain's oldest, launched in 1992. It has seen a surge in traffic amid rail privatization, as Ouigo and Iryo (private firms partly owned by the French and Italian state railways, respectively) grabbed parts of this lucrative rail corridor from Spain's state rail operator, Renfe. But necessary upkeep was not done. Instead, a state company spun off from Renfe in 2005, Adif, was left to handle the tracks—even as revenues from their use were diverted from maintenance towards shareholders of private firms like Ouigo and Iryo.

Throughout last year, rail workers alerted Adif and state authorities of the dangers in the Adamuz area. Adif was forced to issue eight reports last year of problems in signaling equipment, potholes and bumps in the tracks, and imbalances in overhead power lines in the region. These reports continued at least until October, well after Puente claimed the rail track had been repaired.

In August, complaints from train drivers became so serious that the SEMAF union had to write a letter to Adif, warning of "severe wear and tear" on rail infrastructure. The letter said train drivers were raising concerns "daily," but that no action had been taken.

Yesterday, the British *Independent* cited an anonymous source close to the investigation as saying that "experts had found a broken joint on the rails. Technicians on site identified wear on the joint between sections of the rail, known as a fishplate, which they said showed the fault had been there for some time." The source "declined to be identified due to the sensitivity of the issue."

Technicians are raising possible problems with the Iryo train, as well. Jose Trigueros, president of Spain's Association of Road Engineers, examined images released by Spanish authorities and warned of a possible "failure of the undercarriage of the back units" in the Iryo train.

While more details must emerge on the precise causes of the accident, it is rooted in the refusal of state authorities and private firms to fund necessary maintenance. Such funding is incompatible with the right-wing priorities of the PSOE-Podemos, then PSOE-Sumar governments. As the railways were privatized, these governments handed out tens of billions of euros in EU bailout funds to Spanish banks. From when the PSOE-Podemos government took office in 2020 until today, they

nearly doubled publicly-reported military spending, from €18 to €34 billion.

Over the same period, the wealth of top Spanish billionaires surged from €70 to 110 billion for Ormanica Ortega, €4 to 8 billion for Rafael del Pino, and €5 to 8 billion for Juan Roig.

Spain's two rail disasters in the last two days underscore that society cannot function amid the monopolization of such vast wealth by parasitic capitalist oligarchs, abetted by middle class, pseudo-left parties like Podemos.

Workers must be mobilized as broadly as possible against the privatization policies of the PSOE-Sumar government. Workers entering into struggle must also be warned on Podemos, Sumar and union bureaucracies allied to these parties. They have not simply delayed taking necessary action to halt the plunder of the rail industry. In major strikes such as the 2021 Cadiz metalworkers strike or the 2022 Spanish truckers strike, the union bureaucracies worked to rig votes and shut down strikes, while Podemos sat in government as riot police were sent to assault strikers. Today, they will work consciously and relentlessly to strangle strike action against their own privatization policies.

Workers seeking to strike against these policies must organize independently, in rank-and-file security committees, to take control over their working and security conditions. This struggle must proceed as part of a broader, socialist struggle of the working class to expropriate capitalist oligarchs who are plundering society, and use this wealth, created by the working class, to meet social need, not for private profit.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact