

Which way forward for the mass protests for housing and a general strike in Spain?

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The forcible eviction by police of Maricarmen Abascal, aged 87, from her Madrid home have provoked protests by millions of youth and workers in cities across Spain. They marched or occupied city squares across Spain, amid an outpouring of left-wing opposition to the “progressive” Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government. At the center of the movement are calls for a general strike for the right to housing and other fundamental social rights.

Maricarmen’s death on October 7 in hospital provoked protest marches and resolutions calling to continue the struggle by youth and workers occupying city squares across Spain. On Thursday, some 20,000 people marched in Madrid, chanting, “Maricarmen did not die, she was killed” and “Maricarmen lives, the struggle continues.”

Maricarmen’s death was an act of social murder for which capitalist funds speculating in real estate, but also the PSOE-Sumar government which oversaw her eviction, bear responsibility. Protest slogans like “8 days of protests obtained more than 8 years of progressive government” and “For whom do you rule” testify to protesters’ opposition to the current government. They expose the PSOE, Sumar and their allies as tools of the banks and capitalist landlords, hostile to the working class.

The question is how this movement can fight for its aims, and avoid being dissipated or controlled by the PSOE-Sumar authorities. The housing protests have revealed the mass opposition to falling real wages, deteriorating public services, and the diversion of tens of billions of euros towards rearmament and the escalating NATO war with Russia. There is a wide sense among protesting youth and workers that stopping austerity and militarism requires a broader mobilization of the working class in struggle, in a general strike.

This general strike cannot be a one-day, symbolic action meant to support the government authorities responsible for the crisis. It must flow from the mobilization of the revolutionary energy of workers and youth that is erupting in Spain, across Europe and internationally—as in the growing strike movement in the United States, ongoing public sector

strikes in Portugal and high school protests in France.

What is necessary is the formation of independent, rank-and-file committees of action, among workers and youth galvanized by the housing protests in Spain. Such organizations can allow workers and youth to determine themselves the demands and scope of continuing struggles; fight to win broader masses of workers to strike action; and prepare a general strike against the PSOE-Sumar government. Above all, they can develop links with workers and youth, across industries and internationally, who are also struggling against austerity, war, police-state rule and the capitalist system.

The formation of independent organizations of struggle is decisive to prevent the bureaucracies and their petty-bourgeois defenders from channeling protests in Spain back behind the PSOE-Sumar regime. This is what Spain’s union bureaucracies—the Workers’ Commissions (Comisiones Obreras – CCOO), close to the pseudo-left Podemos and Sumar, and the General Union of Workers (Unión General de Trabajadores – UGT), aligned with the PSOE—now seek to do.

Last Monday, after Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced snap elections for November 29, Spain’s main union bureaucracies called a one-day general strike. However, they postponed such action for over a month, to a one-day action on November 11 shortly before the elections. With this delay, the union bureaucracies hope to contain the expanding struggle of workers and youth and channel them towards a false perspective of supporting the PSOE and Sumar in the upcoming elections.

This is a dead end, especially for opposition to the rapid escalation of the NATO war against Russia. In his election announcement, Sánchez boasted of his support for Ukraine and hailed Spain as a “global reference for peace, feminism and prosperity.” But his government has backed NATO war against Russia that threatens to spiral into a nuclear war, while overseeing a massive increase in military spending. It raised Spain’s total military spending to €65 billion last year, (3.92 percent of GDP), while starving social services

of resources.

Sánchez's election call is reactionary political blackmail: it aims to compel workers to vote for the PSOE and its allies, so as to avoid the election of the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the fascistic Vox party. But the threat of a far-right dictatorship cannot be fought by delaying and suppressing the class struggle, and supporting an unpopular PSOE-Sumar government. Fighting fascism and war requires the broadest possible mobilization of the working class in struggle.

This is the opposite of what the union heads, the PSOE-Sumar government and their political satellites intend. Significantly, the CCOO and UGT refused to organize the one-day general strike in Ceuta, Spain's North African enclave. Since tens of thousands of migrants arrived from Morocco this summer, Ceuta has seen a bloody police-military crackdown against migrants. Yet the union leaderships do not want strikes in Ceuta, which could encourage opposition to PSOE-Sumar anti-migrant policies.

Their maneuvers are backed by PSOE-Sumar officials, who claim the strike is against the right-wing opposition, not them. "General strikes are called against governments," PSOE Deputy General Secretary María Jesús Montero said, but, "In this case, the general strike is called against the opposition." Sánchez welcomed the bureaucracies' one-day strike call: "It is a constitutional right. We as a government cannot do anything other than respect it." The Labour Ministry, headed by Sumar leader Yolanda Díaz, stressed its "absolute respect" for the strike, admitting that housing is "essentially a problem of workers."

Likewise, the union bureaucracies are insisting that the November 11 strike should support, not oppose, the government. CCOO Secretary Unai Sordo insisted that the strike was "not really a strike against the government," stressing that the government side "has an opportunity" in the November elections. UGT Secretary Pepe Álvarez insisted that the November 11 strike in Spain is "not a classic general strike," as "economic and labour policies in Spain have worked."

But Spain and Europe are erupting in protests because austerity and militarism do not "work" for the working class. Maricarmen's appeal resonates today as a call to keep fighting not only the far-right threat, but also the PSOE-Sumar regime: "I have not managed to defend my home, but I have fought so that others learn to fight for theirs ... It was not possible, but please keep fighting."

The task facing working people is to fight to prepare a genuine general strike, not to limit themselves to one-day actions controlled by pro-government organizations. In the lead-up to the 1936 general strike in France, Trotsky explained this against the policies of the French CGT union

bureaucracy:

The general strike is, by its very essence, a political act. It opposes the working class, as a whole, to the bourgeois state. It assembles together union and non-union workers, Socialists, Communists and non-party men. It requires an apparatus with a press and agitators ... The general strike poses directly the question of the conquest of power by the proletariat. The CGT has turned and is turning its back on this task (the leaders of the CGT turn their faces towards the bourgeois power).

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The independent organization of workers and youth in struggle in committees of action is decisive. This can group them together, allow for the necessary discussion of international revolutionary perspective, and organize delegations to go to factories, workplaces, among students and in working class neighborhoods to call for the broadest possible development of the class struggle.



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