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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Pascual Serrano
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A ghost haunts the world: the Great Renunciation

Accusations that it is social benefits that have discouraged work and encouraged laziness are false.



At a rate of already four and a half million a month, 34.4 million American workers left their jobs in the first nine months of 2021, exhausted and fed up with abusive working conditions. The pandemic has made thousands of people rethink many things. We are unwittingly witnessing an unused general strike.

Silvio Rodríguez speaks in one of his songs of "those who have nothing to lose". These are those who are in such a desperate situation that nothing prevents them from rebelling. And there are many ways to revolt: take up arms, go on strike or... quit your job, tired of being exploited, poorly paid, mistreated, humiliated... I once said that as long as you got up

every morning to go to work, capitalism was guaranteed to function, any other activism was harmless.

For this reason, the real socialism of the twentieth century was more democratic, because when citizens were guaranteed their survival, only if they stopped working they could overthrow it. In fact, this is what happened in some Eastern European countries.

10.4 million unfilled jobs

En los últimos meses, en Estados Unidos ha sido noticia que millones de trabajadores están dimitiendo y abandonando sus empresas. Según el Gobierno de ese país, veintitres millones y medio desde abril a septiembre, los últimos que se han hecho públicos, lo que supone 34,4 millones en lo que iba de 2021. Y siguen subiendo, desde julio ya no bajan de los cuatro millones.

Los expertos lo han bautizado como la Gran Dimisión o la Gran Renuncia, así con mayúsculas. Según el Departamento de Trabajo, en el mes de septiembre hubo un total de 10,4 millones de vacantes de puestos de trabajo sin cubrir.

Diferentes motivos

Sin duda la pandemia ha sido un detonante porque ha mostrado muchas cosas sin precedentes en los trabajadores:

1. Para algunos trabajadores esenciales (sanitarios, repartidores, reponedores, transportistas...) la pandemia les ha supuesto un trabajo agotador del que no se han visto reconocidos ni social, ni profesional ni laboralmente. Muchos han comprobado que sus empresas multiplicaron sus beneficios a costa de la salud y el agotamiento de ellos a cambio de sueldos miserables.

No es que lo diga un líder sindical, lo afirmó a la revista *Time* Robert Reich, el ex secretario de Trabajo de la Administración Clinton «Los empleados no quieren volver a trabajos agotadores o aburridos, con salarios bajos y de mierda. Los trabajadores están quemados. Están hartos. Están fritos. Después de tantas dificultades, enfermedades y muertes durante el año pasado, no van a aguantar más».

Además la inflación ha aumentado a un ritmo superior de lo que lo han hecho los salarios, están ganando menos que antes de la pandemia mientras les dicen que la economía está mejorando.

2. Para los que se vieron obligados a suspender sus trabajos supuso descubrir el descanso, el encuentro con la familia, disponer de tiempo libre.

Según una encuesta realizada por LinkedIn, el 74% de las personas reconocen que el tiempo que han pasado en casa durante la pandemia (bien por los confinamientos o por las recomendaciones de trabajar de forma remota) les ha hecho replantearse su vida, especialmente la laboral. Recordemos que en Estados Unidos la ley no garantiza vacaciones a los trabajadores.

3. A otros que teletrabajaron durante la pandemia, ahora les hacen regresar a su trabajo sin garantías de protección y sin flexibilidad para cuidar de sus familias.

Many, especially women, must take care of their children or elders, or they are unable to do so or they are out of their full pay to someone to take care of them. A [recent report by McKinsey & Co.](#) states that one in four women in the United States is thinking about changing jobs or quitting due to COVID-19. They have come to the conclusion that it does not compensate them to work.

In fact, the groups that renounce the most are the lowest paid. More than half of U.S. workers said they plan to look for a new job next year, according to the survey of job seekers conducted by *Bankrate*. About 56% of workers said their priority was now flexible working hours and telecommuting. According to a survey by *The Conference Board*, millennials question the desirability of returning to the office more than older generations, with 55% of millennials expressing concern about working face-to-face, versus 45% of Gen X participants and 36% of *baby boomers*.

4. On the other hand, for some, teleworking meant a greater labor abuse, without schedules, with full availability and without being able to attend to their domestic work or their children. They have also ended up fed up.

5. Others found that if they got sick they stopped receiving their salary. It is preferable to stop working and take care of yourself than to end up equally unpaid and sick.

[Technology](#)

[More than 500 million compromised accounts: leaked data, now on LinkedIn](#)

April 13, 15:51 GMT

Junk jobs

Meanwhile, the labor trend has been to increase junk or part-time jobs, which did not even serve to provide health insurance, something fundamental for a job to be attractive in the United States. Approximately 40% of resignations in the US belong to the food, hospitality, commerce, factories and health sectors. Employees who face eternal and strenuous schedules, which are changed preventing any family reconciliation. They must endure a lot of stress and a treatment of the public not always correct.

The reactivation of the economy, with the consequent demand for workers in some sectors, has led to an empowerment of some employees who have organized and begun to demand better working conditions. If they are not granted, they are not so afraid to leave and look for another job. According to a Pulse of the American Worker survey, 26% of American workers [planned to look for](#) a job at a different company once the pandemic has subsided.

Accusations that it is social benefits that have discouraged work and encouraged laziness are false. Unemployment benefits expired in September and people continue to quit their jobs.

[Spain](#)

[Telecommuting, the futuristic chimera that lasted as long as a pandemic](#)

July 7, 13:47 GMT

Outside the United States

The next question is what happens in the rest of the world, has a similar phenomenon occurred in other countries?

According to a LinkedIn report, "the proportion of affiliates who changed jobs in October 2021 globally increased by 25% compared to the same period of the year before the pandemic." That is, something is also moving in Europe, but not in the same way as in the United States.

In Spain

In Spain, *Newtral* has investigated to what extent a phenomenon such as the American one may be occurring. According to the data collected from the Ministry of Social Security, the analysis of the experts contacted and the reports of employment portals, "the 'Great Resignation' is not taking place in Spain. However, there are signs of changes in the mentality of workers, especially in the wake of the pandemic."

A [report](#) by the human resources company Adecco in November shows that "58% of companies believe that the risk of suffering from *burnoutsyndrome* has increased in the last year and that emotional disorders related to the health and economic crisis are still maintained compared to a year ago [64%]".

On the other hand, according to Eurostat, Spain is the EU country with the [most overqualified workers](#) for the position they occupy. 38.8% of young Spaniards have an educational level higher than the necessary qualification to perform the tasks of their jobs, and that generates a frustration for which there are two ways out: endure while something better appears or take risks and leave the job.

[Spain](#)

["We both deserve to work": less than 5% of men ask for the reduction of the working day in Spain](#)

June 27, 08:00 GMT

There is another element that in Spain distorts the statistics of job abandonments. It is common that when a person resigns from his job he negotiates with the contractor that it is reflected as an end of contract and not as a voluntary abandonment, in order to access [unemployment](#) benefits. Voluntary withdrawal does not entitle you to benefits.

On the other hand, let's not forget that Spain moves in an employment rate of 15%, too high to think that if you leave a job you will find another easily.

It is true that employers in some sectors, such as hospitality, have denounced in networks and media that they do not find workers. Research shows that what is happening is that

workers in these sectors have begun to claim many of their rights that have been historically denied them. With the pandemic they have verified that, being fraudulently hired for half a day, although they made it complete, the benefits they had left due to the suspension of activity of their company (ERTE) were minimal and did not give them to survive.

14 million in the OECD

However, something is moving globally. Professor [of Economics Juan Torres reveals](#) that "in the 38 countries that are part of the OECD, 14 million people have already stopped considering themselves active because they neither have a job nor seek it. And, compared to 2019, there are three million more young people without jobs, education or training."

Increased vacancies

"In China, Vietnam and other Asian countries, the same thing is also happening, as millions of people who had returned to their villages when the lockdown occurred have not returned to their businesses. And in Europe, we read daily news about the shortage of people to fill jobs in many economic sectors. In Germany it is estimated that there are about 400,000 vacant jobs, in France 300,000 and in Spain almost 120,000, 88% of them in the service sector, "he adds.

[Spain](#)

[Spain approves the spending ceiling for 2022 and a historic offer of public employment](#)

July 27, 12:11 GMT

In Torres' opinion, "the reality is that the labor model of neoliberalism has generalized the lowest wages with the permanent excuse that this was essential to create jobs. By lowering the wage bill, the sales of the companies have decreased and that has caused less activity and employment to be generated. Thus an army of unemployed has been created that has allowed wages not to rise and working conditions to worsen incessantly, for the benefit of large companies [not all of them, because a large part is harmed by the fall in sales and activity that I have pointed out]".

A ghost roams the world

It seems that the workers are getting fed up and, even without coordination or unionization, they are unknowingly initiating an unofficial general strike. A new ghost is

sweeping the world, the ghost of the resignation of millions of workers to continue working in the conditions they were in before the lockdown.

Pascual Serrano

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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