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PSOE-Podemos government arrests Cádiz workers as strikes spread in Spain



Protesters march during a strike of metal workers in Cadiz, southern Spain, November 23, 2021. (AP Photo/Javier Fergo)

The Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos coalition government arrested at least six people in raids in the southern Spanish city of Cádiz Thursday on charges of “public disorder, causing damage, causing injury and attacking law enforcement officers.” The charges cite actions that allegedly took place during the powerful metalworkers’ strike in this city at the end of November.

The Cádiz strikers faced down riot police sent by the “progressive” PSOE-Podemos government, who assaulted them with tear gas, truncheons and rubber bullets. As workers and supporters took to the streets to defend the strike, the government deployed a 15-ton BMR (*Blindado Medio sobre Ruedas*, Medium Armoured Vehicle on Wheels), which became known as the “tankette.”

Thursday’s arrests were made among workers in the neighbourhood of San Pedro, one of the areas through which the BMR drove during the strike, crashing through obstacles on the street. Many residents shouted slogans denouncing the “tankette” from the balconies of their homes.

At least one of the arrested workers was seized by police while taking his daughter to school, leaving his wife to console the terrified five-year-old girl outside the school gates. Others were taken from their homes in the early hours of the morning, without being told the reasons for their arrests, one Cádiz metalworker told *elDiario.es*.

The PSOE-Podemos government’s arrests are a blatant attempt to punish workers for exercising their right to strike, and intimidate others who are planning to do so. It utterly exposes the right-wing character of these two parties. After having attacked Cádiz workers with militarised violence during the strike, the PSOE and Podemos are now desperately trying to prevent further militant industrial action by making an example out of these workers.

In this they are fully supported by their lackeys in the unions. After selling out the Cádiz workers, the corporatist unions, led by the Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the PSOE-aligned General Workers Union (UGT), have scrambled to demobilise or cancel strikes across the country, terrified that workers’ militancy could get out of their control.

But despite the PSOE-Podemos government’s intimidation tactics, and repeated sell-outs by the union bureaucracies, workers remain determined to fight. Numerous strikes are due to take place in Spain over the next month, especially in the transport and logistics sectors. The new wave of industrial action comes amid an upsurge of the class struggle internationally, including strikes by autoworkers and Kellogg’s food production workers

in the USA, transport workers in the UK and India, and health care workers in Sri Lanka and Turkey.

In Spain, ground and air crew at airline EasyJet, as well as at cargo handling contractor Menzies, will take part in indefinite strikes every Friday and Saturday from December 17, in opposition to plans to lay off about 20 percent of the workforce since the start of the pandemic. A protest against the mass sackings organised at Málaga airport on December 13 attracted more than 100 workers.

On January 12, cleaning workers at Madrid-Barajas airport will launch an indefinite strike against poor working conditions. The employer, Sacyr Facilities, has kept 70 percent of the airport's workforce on furlough, despite a significant uptick in air travel since the start of the pandemic, leading to severe staffing shortages at the airport and impossible workloads for the remaining workers.

A stoppage of lorry drivers across the country is also set to take place between December 20 and 22, though there are calls for the industrial action to be indefinite. Drivers are demanding improved working conditions, including the construction of safe rest areas and limitations on the amount of loading and unloading they are expected to carry out. They are also protesting poor compensation, under conditions in which rising fuel costs and plans for "Eurovignette" toll roads are reducing real pay.

The strike has received widespread support from lorry drivers. Estimates from the sector indicate that around 95 percent of the 21,000 trucks in the northern region of Galicia will not be operating on the strike days. The remaining 5 percent of vehicles will be active in order to allow essential supplies to reach pharmacies and hospitals.

Around 2,000 administrative and maintenance workers at Spanish air traffic control company Enaire had also been due to strike on December 23 and 26, but the industrial action was cancelled by the UGT, CCOO, USO (Syndicalist Workers Union) and CSPA (Confederation of Professional Aeronautical Unions) on Thursday. Aiming to limit the impact of the strike, the unions had already refused to call out air traffic controllers in support of their administrative colleagues.

The strike had been called to demand the restoration of productivity pay dating back to 2020. The productivity bonus was included in a 2018 pay agreement for workers at Enaire and Aena, an airport management firm of which Enaire owns a 51 percent stake. In a divide-and-conquer manoeuvre, only workers at Aena were awarded the bonus in 2020, excluding Enaire employees, though both sets of workers received the additional pay in 2019.

Unions claimed on Thursday that Enaire workers would receive the back pay in this month's paycheck, but no further details have so far been given. There is no indication as to whether this productivity bonus will continue into 2022.

A strike of workers at coach transportation company Auto Res was also called off on Friday. Workers had been set to walk out over the Christmas period, on December 24, 26 and 31, and on January 2, to fight the closure of ticket offices and customer service centres, and to oppose the cutting of services across the country.

Under conditions in which the government has refused to issue a stay-at-home lockdown to fight the spread of COVID-19, workers were also denouncing Auto Res's maintenance of large numbers of workers on furlough, which the company is using to avoid paying workers their full salaries.

Outside of transport and logistics, strikes are also scheduled or threatened among dairy producers, fishing workers, labour inspectors and lottery workers, to demand improved working conditions, staffing and pay.

This new wave of industrial action in Spain comes amid a prolonged assault on workers' living and working conditions over many years, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers have seen unprecedented cut in real wages, while skyrocketing energy prices, fuel costs and inflation rates have pushed many to the brink of poverty.

Inflation reached 5.6 percent in November, as compared to the same month in 2020. This is significantly above the 4.9 percent rate in the Eurozone as a whole. Between October 2007 and October 2021, inflation went up by 21.7 percent according to the National Statistics Institute (INE). Meanwhile, the Spanish Tax Agency indicates that average salaries in the private sector rose by only 5.1 percent between 2007 and 2020, leading to a

significant decline in purchasing power. Energy bills have also skyrocketed, jumping 63 percent in the year up to October 2021.

While millions of workers have been pushed to the edge of poverty during the pandemic, 2020–21 was a bonanza year for Spain's super-rich. The richest 10 individuals in Spain saw their fortunes increase by 17 percent this year alone, going up €153 billion. This is the equivalent of €565,000 a day.

Workers must take their struggle out of the hands of the unions, forming rank-and-file committees in every workplace. This requires a decisive political break with the PSOE-Podemos government, which has proven time and time again its visceral hostility to the working class.

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