

Spanish workers strike against being forced to work without protection

By Alejandro López
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Workers of the Spanish pizza restaurant chain Telepizza went on strike on Saturday after 11 employees were sanctioned for refusing to work in unprotected environments. Days before, Glovo, Deliveroo and Uber Eats workers staged a protest in Madrid, which was dispersed by the police.

Strikes and protests are growing against the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government's murderous policy—endorsed by the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) and social democratic General Union of Labour (UGT) unions—of sending millions of non-essential workers back to work, no matter the death toll. Spain's COVID-19 deaths rose to 20,453 yesterday, while the number of recorded infections has passed 195,944, including 30,000 health care workers.

The government now plans to make children, one of the most contagious age groups, leave home next week and return to school, as part of its “de-escalation of confinement measures.”

The vast majority of workers oppose this policy. Last Saturday, Telepizza workers went on strike, called by the General Confederation of Labour (Confederación General del Trabajo-CGT), their third strike this year. While previously they struck against precarious jobs and wages, now they are striking against management's decision to impose disciplinary sanctions on 11 workers, including suspending them from employment and wages for 20 days, after they refused to work without personal protective equipment (PPE) and health and safety protocols.

Telepizza workers have been denouncing the lack of health and safety equipment for weeks. When the state of alarm and lockdown was announced three weeks ago in Spain—lifted partially last week for millions of non-essential workers—Telepizza was classified as an “essential service.” Many Telepizza staff opposed this,

saying junk food offered by Telepizza is not an essential service. This did not stop the Madrid region from striking a deal with the firm to offer meals to 12,000 schoolchildren from low-wage families while schools remain closed.

The following day, workers in Palencia decided to not go to work. One worker told *El Norte de Castilla*: “Most of the workers agreed not to go to work. So we didn't go because we consider it unsafe and we are not offering an essential service, like supermarkets.”

On Saturday, the strike (*huelga*) became a trending topic on Twitter, #HuelgaTelepizzaCovid, with tens of thousands of tweets in support from workers in similar situations. One worker wrote, “All my support to our sanctioned colleagues. All of us have to do the same. I hope the example sets a spark. Self-organisation and strike!”

While the CGT has been forced to call the strike amid mounting anger, in truth it has done everything possible to isolate the strikers. While it is smaller than the CCOO and UGT, it controls layers of the union bureaucracy in auto manufacturing (GM, SEAT, Renault, Nissan, Volkswagen, and Ford), as well as in the civil services, post offices, banking, health and education sectors. It has received over a million votes in trade union elections, but has not mounted any broader action during the pandemic and is working to isolate the Telepizza strike.

CCOO and the UGT have remained completely silent on the strike, working as policemen for the PSOE-Podemos government. Both union confederations have sanctioned the policy of the government and companies to not provide safe working environments and PPE, declaring the day before the government ordered millions back to work that such precautions “are difficult to apply in the vast majority

of work places.”

On Thursday, nearly 100 riders from Glovo, Deliveroo and Uber Eats—the on-demand courier services that purchase, pick up, and deliver meals and food products—protested in the centre of Madrid against pay cuts, precarious conditions and the lack of PPE. Protests also happened in Seville, Malaga and Cartagena. All erupted outside the official trade unions.

Protesting on their motorbikes and bicycles in the empty streets of Madrid, they demanded the companies provide them with PPE and a bonus for working in an unhealthy environment. The companies have refused so far, claiming the workers are independent contractors and therefore the company is not required to cover these costs.

Workers at Glovo, a Spanish start-up founded in 2015 and valued at over \$1 billion, also went to company headquarters in Madrid to protest the unilateral reduction of the base rate per order, from €2.50 to €1.20 per order. Soon after, police intervened to identify protesters and disperse the demonstration.

This represents the second open confrontation between the police and the workers since the start of the pandemic. A few weeks ago, police assaulted steelworkers in the Basque country protesting against being forced back to unsafe, non-essential jobs amid the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

Podemos—a petty-bourgeois populist organisation, hailed by the pseudo-left as Europe’s next “radical democratic” party after the defeat of the Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) government in Greece—is showing its true face. Syriza went down in history for blatantly betraying its election promises, imposing the most austerity measures and anti-refugee policies of any recent Greek government. Podemos is following suit, using its time in government to force millions of workers back to work amid a deadly pandemic, a move endangering the lives of countless thousands of workers.

The criminal role played by Podemos exposes its allies such as Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of La France Insoumise, and Katja Kipping of Die Linke, and is a warning of what would happen if they came to power in the US, UK, France or Germany.

While it is not yet known how many infections and deaths will result from this policy, it is clear that the

“progressive” PSOE-Podemos government is terrified at growing social opposition to their policies and is working with the armed services to prepare repression of the working class. On Sunday, the head of the General Staff of the Civil Guard, Colonel José Manuel Santiago, commented overtly on this in the daily press conference on the pandemic. He said that one of the Civil Guard’s functions in the pandemic is to “minimize the opposition climate to the government’s crisis management.”

He made this remark while discussing how the Spanish government monitors “fake news,” which, Santiago said, is provoking “social stress.” The Interior Ministry was forced to make a statement hours later, claiming this was a “lapse” on Santiago’s part.

Santiago’s statement underscores the terror of the PSOE and Podemos at growing opposition among workers to their back-to-work policy amid the pandemic, and highlights the growing sentiment in ruling circles to use the army against the population.

According to a poll on Saturday by *El País*, 59 percent of the population supports the argument that “Confinement must be kept to the maximum, even if this implies greater economic deterioration and more unemployment.”

The role of Podemos, which includes significant sections of the officer corps within its ranks, is a warning to workers in Spain and internationally. It is critical to fight for the formation of rank-and-file action committees in workplaces and factories, to fight to defend lives and livelihoods and to build a new revolutionary leadership in the working class fighting for a socialist perspective against Podemos. Only through the formation of such committees can the Spanish working class fight to halt all non-essential production, and provide protection to all workers in essential industries.

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