

General Strike in Spain: A message has been sent

From a correspondent in Madrid Tue, 20/11/2012 - 09:41

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The Spanish working class showed its anger and opposition to the cuts policies of the right-wing government of PM Mariano Rajoy on November 14 by striking and demonstrating in more than one hundred massive demos across the country. The Madrid and Barcelona demonstrations gathered hundreds of thousands, in Malaga there was the largest demonstration since 1977, and the numbers were remarkable in all other cities. A clamour that should be listened to not only by the government, which had the honour of facing its second general strike after only eleven months in office, a new national record, but also by the left parties and union leaders.

It is pretty clear by now that there is something else, apart from the ultra-liberal politics of Partido Popular and their more than passing resemblance to fascist practices, which worries the working class: the lack of any effective leadership in the left, the nonexistence of left alternatives, and the lazy and idle ways of the union leaders. All this together discourages the working class but November 14 showed that the Spanish working class is ready for the struggle, if only there was a struggle to fight.

The leaders of the mass trade unions CCOO (Comisiones Obreras) and UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores) should take into account this roar from the workers and give up immediately any idea of reaching agreements with the bosses and their party. They must, as of now, lead a left turn and step up the struggle against the cuts with firmness and decision, and call a new general strike, of 48 hours this time.

The working class is ready to fight, but the political and union leaders need to regain the trust of the workers, lost during five years of crisis and dismantling of welfare state and social rights. However, in spite of lack of such leadership, November 14 was a quite encouraging day for the working class who had needed so far to express itself through other ways like May 15 (the Indignados of the so-called #spanish revolution) or September 25 (Surround the Congress).

The only effective way for the working class to fight is the sectoral and general strikes, and still better if this is done in an international context as was the case this time across large parts of Europe and especially with our comrades in Portugal, but also in the rest of countries under ruthless attacks of capitalists, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, as well as in Britain, France and Germany.

An increasing questioning of bourgeoisie democracy is undeniably present in Spanish society, a system that, after Spain's much vaunted 'exemplary transition to democracy' has shown its true face: a state serving the big capitalists and bosses, a state eager to make the pensioners pay for their medication in order to bail out private banks. This questioning was expressed in the demonstrations through slogans such as 'Together we can?', 'People united will never be defeated?', 'No retreat against the cuts?', 'A General Strike is needed?'. Many workers realized something that had been long forgotten, that without them not a single thing works: buses do not move, factories do not produce, food is not grown; that they can demand better jobs conditions, public health care, public education, social assistance?

The obstacle represented by the main union leaders must be removed; unions need to follow a path from protest to power or lose any legitimacy to further represent the Spanish working class. We must keep and increase the minimum unity shown on November 14 in order to be ready for next steps to resist and fight back against the new attacks from the bosses, but the most important thing is to break all links to the bosses and their corporations, otherwise the fight will be lost.

We all should demand an organised revival of the unions, recruiting members to fight against the imminent new cuts of the Partido Popular, to resist the attacks of the shameless fascist-like mass media and to reverse the situation of losses and more losses for the working class. But this can only be done through a deep democratisation of our unions and left parties; this is the clamour in the streets.

Our supposed leaders have received a clear message: they must lead the fight, so that we all together can defend ourselves against the savage attacks of the bosses, to fight for a different society, free from capitalism, the ultimate cause of exploitation and social injustice.

Dark perspectives

At the same time as celebrating the good result of the strike and even better of the demonstrations, we should not be blind to other, not so positive, aspects of the day:

The strike was massively observed mainly by the large industries and building sites, which proves that the working class is still the only segment of society able to present organised resistance. This is indeed a proof of the weakness of other kinds of initiatives as 'we are 99%' or the 'new' idea of a former leader of the United Left of creating a so-called 'broad front'. No, we are not 99%, we are quite a lot less, but we are the working class, and together with students, who backed massively the strike and demos, we are the ones that can change the world.

The strike of November 14th was a major step forward, but it was not a complete success either. The country did not stop; this kind of strike was not able to present an effective resistance against a government that controls nearly all political power in Spain, at all levels, local, regional and national. A tame general strike, which respects all the laws, is simply not enough.

The union leaders delayed the call too much, as usual. They included in the call grotesque demands like the one for a referendum about the cuts, and they worked hard to keep the movement well under their control, as requested by their true bosses. They have accepted the argument that 'minimum services' must be maintained, especially in public offices, so that in some sectors the strike was almost meaningless.

Small companies and workshops did not observe the strike. There are two reasons for this, not only the existence of a sizeable layer of reactionary scabs in the working class that see themselves as middle class, but also the savage labour law, shamelessly accepted by the trade unions, that makes many workers well aware that if they strike one day, they will lose their jobs the next. The real blame for these workers not striking lies with the trade union leaders who work hard to keep the picket action within legal limits, which means being ineffective.

Commercial shops did not close either. This should serve as clear evidence to those that still claim that the 'citizen' or the 'middle classes' are a social force. Well, maybe they are, but of the deeply reactionary class, as was always the case in Spain.

Finally, it is also necessary to remember that the defence guards of bourgeois democracy, the Police, have shown once again, and even more clearly than in past action days, that they won't hesitate to smash heads as ordered by their bosses, the heads of those that pay for their salaries, money which should be

used for education and health care instead of feeding this fascist scum.

The Government of Partido Popular knows that it can resist many strikes like this one with no danger at all for their policies and offices. They can continue with the spoliation of the workers' rights and social gains of decades of struggle, they can continue the demolition of the welfare state because they face only an ineffective opposition.

The Spanish working class needs to find an alternative, of the revolutionary kind, that will pose clearly and without ambiguity the question of taking over power, of creating a new society with social justice instead of capitalism; an alternative that will only work internationally, a new world revolutionary party. Otherwise, they will find that the reactionaries hold all the trump cards.

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