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Spain

Ten million strike against Aznar's attacks

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All the indications are that support for the general strike across the Spanish state on June 20, 2002 was greater than in any other general strike since the end of the Franco dictatorship. The strike was particularly solid in sectors like building, industry, agriculture, transport and teaching. Geographically, the strike won most support in the autonomous communities of Asturias, Andalusia, [1] Extremadura and Catalonia.

Nonetheless, this was also one of the least 'visible' strikes because the government and the media it controls did their best to conceal it. The government did not hesitate to lie [2] on the question of the extent of support for the strike and used all the power at its disposal to reduce the effects of the strike on citizens by imposing minimum services in transport and communications which assured an appearance of quasi-normality.

The strikers were conscious of this strategy to obscure their strike and thus the demonstrations called at the end of the day on June 20 were not only the biggest in comparison with previous general strikes but also often the biggest that the towns concerned had ever known. In the streets of Barcelona and Madrid there were nearly 500,000 demonstrators, figures similar to the immense mobilization against the EU summit on March 16, 2002 in Barcelona.

Without any doubt this strike reveals that under an appearance of conformism - motivated essentially by the climate of social peace ensured by the orientation of mainstream trades unionism - the working population is deeply unhappy with the social situation social, its working conditions and the policies of the Popular Party (PP) government. This unhappiness was expressed through the participation in the general strike. It could also be seen that, contrary to what was claimed by the government in justifying its decree reforming the conditions of the unemployed, wage earners have not accepted the message of division between those who have a job and those who do not. On the contrary, they have understood that that the lowering of legal protection in case of being laid off, the reductions in unemployment benefits and the obligation on the unemployed to accept any job in order to claim benefit all represent attacks against the basic legislation protecting labour against capital and hence amount to an aggression against all.

If the initiative for this strike was in the hands of the unions who called it, the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and the General Union of Labour (UGT), the participation and support of other social and political forces of the left was very important, in particular that of the Campaign against the Europe of Capital and Against War, which supported the principle of the general strike from the beginning and participated with its own cortèges in the demonstrations of June 20 in Seville and Barcelona. Finally, it is worth noting that the separate appeal of the nationalist trade union organizations in Euskadi for a general strike on June 19 led to the strike being less well supported in the Basque autonomous community, both on June 19 and 20.

After the strike the government called on the unions to negotiate amendments to the decree, which it now wishes to transform into law. The first reaction of the unions was to reject this procedure and call for the pursuit of 'social dialogue' but the situation has changed so much between before and after June 20 that it will be very difficult to return to the social peace of the six past years of the PP government.

To maximize the benefits of this strike and continue the process that has been initiated, we must pursue an orientation of firm opposition to the decree of reform on unemployment, linking this struggle with the rejection of all the antisocial policies of the PP. We must deepen the convergence of the social movements and actors which are already mobilized against the PP's policies: against anti-immigrant legislation, the hydrological Plan, reforms in education, in support of trade union struggles and those of the 'anti-globalisation' movement. We must strengthen the European dimension of the response to conservative aggression, as was done in this struggle and in the

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mobilizations against the EU summit in Seville. At the end of the day, faced with the rightist offensive of the PP and its European allies, we can and must create a powerful social dynamic which will put an end to the climate of passivity and individualism which has prevailed until now.

[1] Andalusia and Extremadura are directly affected by the reduction of unemployment benefits for temporary agricultural workers.

[2] On June 20, at 8 am the government said that the strike had not taken place and at the end of the day it claimed that it had only been followed by 17% of employees, while the CCOO and UGT claim 10 million strikers, or a rate of participation of 84%.