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Spanish state

Workers' mobilization in Cadiz for power translated into rights

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Industry is dying in the Bay of Cádiz. It is about choosing between depending solely on tourism and the permanent blackmail of precariousness or emigration or betting on a fair, innovative ecological conversion alongside quality jobs.

To understand the workers' mobilizations in the Bay of Cádiz that are today shaking the city of Cádiz we need to go back in time. And not a week, with the last announcement of the closure of the Airbus Puerto Real plant. Nor to 2013, with the ten arrested at the shipyards. Not even to 2007, with the closure of Delphi. [1] To understand these mobilizations, we must go much further back. Specifically, to the late 1970s and early 1980s.

If we had to choose a photo to illustrate the conflict, it would be the one with graffiti on the industrial highway. It's the same scenario where today traffic is blocked at the entrance to the Navantia factory; the same one where they light the fire that so surprises Madrid and makes them finally focus on the south; the same one where the façade was painted with two words: "Felipe cabrón" ("Felipe the bastard"). That Felipe was González. [2] That bastard really meant traitor. Because it was in those years that the industrial reconversion of our bay was carried out which still, to this day, drags us down and makes us suffer. Because it was at that moment that they tip-toed around our land and condemned it to a fate of precariousness, job instability and an economy based on a sector as seasonal and as fragile as tourism, one basket in which they placed all the eggs.

The industrial reconversion that the PSOE began and that the PP later continued and deepened has slowly brought with it the dismantling of a large part of heavy industry. Although many think that it was a clean cut, it was not like that. It was a wound that, little by little, with the passage of time, continues to bleed us even now. When we assert that fire and smoke was needed for them to take notice of us, we mean this: this is a conflict that has been smouldering for more than forty years. A summer and a few months in which peaceful demonstrations have occurred, in which we have repeatedly asked for a meeting with the Ministers of Labor, Industry and Economy without even receiving a response. Now, precisely now, is when Nadia Calviño [3] has finally come to the conflict in Cádiz and precisely not to support the workers.

During these past months, Airbus announced the dismantling of the Puerto Real factory. It is, strangely, the only factory that is going to close in the whole of Europe, despite the 2,635 million euros of profits that the multinational made in the last year. This even though it has been a model factory, with the lowest rates of absenteeism in the world at just 1 per cent. The only real reason is that they will move production to Getafe, where 400 million of public money has been invested. Future orders and work exist but what does not is an equitable distribution between different parts of the country.

For this reason, the fight that is currently taking place cannot be limited to the negotiation of a new labor agreement, it is also a fight against the systematic precariousness to which they condemned this land. It is about the present and the future of the Bay. It is about not losing what little we have left and of regaining hope. It is about the decades shackled by lost working conditions. The new agreement which they want to the workforce to submit to not only does not include a minimum salary increase, but, on the contrary, proposes the loss of purchasing power, and attacks the dignity of workers as it aims to legitimise and legalise a situation that borders on a regime of semi-slavery.

In a short video made in support of his colleagues, a metal worker said that the objective of the mobilizations is to "obtain power", a power translated into rights. The power and the right to a vacation without fear of losing your job, the power and the right to seek compensation after a work accident, the power and the right to help a sick relative.

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By the way, the video by the metal worker we mentioned was recorded hundreds of kilometers from his home, because to be able to put bread on his family's table he had to emigrate. Do you understand now?

And these conditions of semi-slavery or of the closure of a factory in Puerto Real are political issues. Because in the case of Airbus, for example, there is direct involvement by the Government, which through SEPI [4] sits on the Airbus board of directors and has committed public assistance to the same company that closes a model plant in the heart of the Bay of Cádiz. And in the case of Navantia, we are talking about a public company that, by perpetuating subcontracting and outsourcing contracts, has atomized workers at all levels and has cut their rights—which proves that violence is, at times, white-collar and systematic.

Having to lie in the emergency department after a work accident and claim that it was a domestic mishap is violence. Not being able to accompany a sick family member to the hospital is violence. A salary that does not allow you to make ends meet while your company takes huge amounts of public money is violence. Rises in costs of electricity, gas, the CPI while they freeze your income is violence. Having to travel hundreds and thousands of kilometres from your home on a regular basis is violence. As a rule, the working class of this province has suffered this violence for decades. And we say the working class in its totality without exemptions. Because these mobilizations have brought together the entire working class of the Bay. From the shipyards to aerospace. From the Navantia staff to that of the support staff. And I tell you, all the workers cannot be wrong. They all have a reason.

The shipbuilding and aerospace industries hang by a thread in the Bay, the sector is dying. We urgently need to change the model of production and really go for reindustrialization. It is about choosing between depending solely on tourism, which means having to subject new generations to the constant blackmail of precariousness or emigration, or betting on a future of fair ecological reconversion, science, innovation, added value and quality jobs. That is what we risk. And it is urgent.

In that decade of the 1980s, the working-class neighborhoods became bastions of support, neighbors applauded from their balconies and the city turned upside down knowing that the fate of an entire bay was at stake. On Thursday, the marches of the working people were supported once more from the windows above. Fortunately, there are things, such as the loyalty of the people of Cadiz that do not change either. They erased the graffiti on the industrial highway, but they did not erase the feeling of identity and community with our workers because “the causes for which we fight are difficult, but they are so just that that one day we will win them”, as Diamantino García said. [5]

19 November 2021

Translated from [ctxt](#) and annotated by David Fagan.

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[1] In 2007 multinational Delphi Automotive Systems Holding Inc. announced the closure of its plant in Puerto Real, Cádiz, with a loss of 1600 direct jobs and more than 2500 indirect jobs.

[2] Felipe González Márquez, leader of the Spanish social-democracy and Prime Minister of Spain from 1982 to 1996.

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[3] Minister for Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation

[4] Sociedad Estatal de Participaciones Industriales /State Company for Industrial Holdings

[5] Diamantino García Acosta (1943 - 1995), known as *El cura de los pobres*, was a Spanish worker priest and trade unionist, founding member of the Sindicato de Obreros del Campo.