

Strikes and protests spread across Europe

For a 24-hour all-Europe general strike

This is an extract from a statement of the Committee for a Workers International, in preparation for a European day of action on 29 September. It was published on 24 August. See socialistworld.net for the full statement.

THE EUROPEAN Trade Union Confederation has called an international day of workers' action for 29 September. The coordinated protests, action and general strikes, have the potential to shake the continent.

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) [the international organisation which the Socialist Party is part of] will work enthusiastically to mobilise workers and youth to take action on the day, under the banner of international struggle and solidarity, against Europe's axe-wielding governments and the dictatorship of the capitalist markets.

The attacks implemented across the continent in most cases represent the most brutal austerity programmes implemented in living memory. The devastating 'slash-and-burn' policies of the Greek Pasok government, 'in return' for its 'bailout' from the coffers of the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have meant dramatic attacks on the already impoverished Greek working class.

A real cut of between 30% and 50% in public pensions and public-sector wages slashed by between 25% and 30% have been emulated in Spain and Portugal.

The Spanish government's austerity package will see public-sector wages and pensions attacked, as well as a €55 billion public spending cuts programme.

In Portugal, where workers receive among the lowest wages in Europe (with a monthly minimum wage of only €475), public sector workers are being hit with a four-year pay freeze and a raising of the retirement age to 67.

Savage cuts

IN BRITAIN the Con-Dem coalition government has announced a package which includes attacks on social benefits and savage cuts of 25% or more in every area of public spending. Angela Merkel's coalition government in Germany is set to slash €80 billion in the next four years.

Greece has recently been the epicentre of developments in Europe. However, as well as the near collapse of its state finances, it is the tidal wave of struggle - with six general strikes in 2010 - that has put it at the centre of developments. This has aroused the fighting instincts of workers around the continent.

Massive strikes and demonstrations have been seen in France where two million took to the streets to defend pensions. Italy, where a general strike against the government took place in July, is braced for a significant national demonstration on 16 October organised by the FIOM, a metal workers' union, which has led the way in putting forward a militant strategy in fighting attacks on wages and conditions.

On 29 September Spain will be shaken by its first full general strike in response to the devastating crisis that has left over four million unemployed and to the anti-working class reaction

of its government (see box).

However, in most countries, the cowardly role of the majority of trade union leaders, in refusing to organise an effective struggle, means they still stand as a brake on the development of a decisive response by the working class to capitalism's austerity offensive.

The forces of the CWI in these countries struggle uncompromisingly against the ineffective strategy of the conservative right-wing trade union officialdom to meet the attacks faced by the working class and youth. They are seeking to build an opposition to these leaders which can counterpose a programme of militant action.

In a number of countries, working class militants have already made crystal clear their desire to escalate the fightback with general strikes. In Portugal, a wave of strikes and mass demonstrations, including one of over 300,000 on 29 May, has indicated the ripeness of the situation for a general strike to force back the Socrates government from its austerity offensive of massive cuts and privatisations.

An enthusiastic call for Portuguese workers to join their Spanish brothers and sisters in a mighty Iberian general strike, would undoubtedly be met with a massive response, and represent a momentous step forward, uniting workers across borders in militant action.

Working-class militants in Greece, including the comrades of Xekinima (CWI in Greece), also demand that trade unions announce their joining up with the Spanish workers in battle on 29 September. A similar mood exists in France; after two union-organised 'days of action' this year, a massive day of strikes and protests is set to take place on 7 September. A real general strike of the public and private sector represents the next step forward for the struggle against the Sarkozy government's anti-working class reforms.

The pressing need for working class internationalism is also posed by capitalism's attempts to stoke up nationalist and divisive sentiments. They serve the purpose of attempting to distract attention away from their brutal attacks.

Strikes and protests on 29 September should be undertaken with the perspective of further developing such action and with the objective of building for a 24-hour all-

- No to cuts and austerity. Defend public services and pensions. Make the bosses pay for their crisis.
- For massive strikes and protests on/around 29 September. For a plan of action towards a 24-hour all-Europe general strike.
- For a fighting working-class movement. For militant and democratic trade unions, and combative workers' political parties.
- No to the dictatorship of the market! Down with the credit ratings agencies and the IMF. No to payment of the capitalists' foreign debt. Take the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich speculators. Nationalise the banks and financial sector under the democratic control and management of working people.
- No to mass unemployment. For a shorter working week, to share out the work with no loss of pay. Demand massive public works programmes to provide socially useful work for millions.
- No to the EU of the bosses and the markets. For a democratic socialist Europe.

Spain: class struggle the biggest show in town



A generalised fightback is needed to defeat the attacks.

ANY GLANCE at newspapers or TV news programmes anywhere in the Spanish state in the last days and weeks would leave no-one in doubt as to the change that has taken place in the situation here. In the run-up to the general strike on 29 September the class struggle has become the biggest show in town.

CWI reporters

In the northern regions of Galicia and Asturias, thousands of miners have taken militant action against the government's proposal to throw the industry's entire workforce onto the scrapheap of mass unemployment, and have announced a series of strike days at the end of September.

The fires which blazed on their road and railway blockades, and graced the front pages of Spain's main daily newspapers stood out as a symbol of the new situation in a country where the working class is poised to decisively enter the stage of struggle. Even the Guardia Civil (police force) has joined the tide of protest, with thousands of its ranks taking to the streets in Madrid to demand better conditions!

The general strike on 29 September will represent the coming together of these isolated points of resistance into a single blow - a battering ram against the offensive of the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the international markets. But one gen-

eral strike will not be sufficient to force the hand of the government and capitalism, determined to persevere with their agenda of attacks and austerity, in service to the international bondholders.

Zapatero's labour reform bill, which provoked the calling of the general strike, is set to be followed up by an attack on the pension system, the raising of the retirement age to 67 and the implementation of over €50 billion in public sector cuts.

Only a sustained programme of action, with a series of general strikes and coordinated actions can stop this onslaught in its tracks. At a general strike preparatory assembly in one of the barrios of Granada in Andalucía, a regional leader of the CC.OO (workers' commissions) warned of the inevitable necessity of further generalised action, calling for 'a general strike every month', until the government turns back.

The CWI in Spain calls for the formation of democratic assemblies and committees of action in workplaces, universities, schools and communities to develop the next steps for the struggle. Only a generalised movement to bring down the attacks, linked to the fight for an alternative, genuinely socialist economic plan can offer a way out to Spain's workers and youth, its unemployed millions and battered economy.

CWI members and supporters will intervene in the general strike in a number of the Spanish state's major cities.



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Cindy Sheehan, US anti-war activist

Andros Payiatsos, general secretary, CWI Greece

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

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