

COAL MINERS' STRIKE

Spain in Turmoil

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Unions for coal mining workers are waging a general strike. In more than 40 coal mines in northern Spain, thousands of miners protesting austerity measures are on strike for weeks. "Austerity" will take away about 4,000 mining jobs. The miners are defending the jobs and protesting plans to cut subsidies, about two-third. Reducing of subsidies will deeply hurt the mining industry.

Charging and clashing with the striking miners for several hours the police tried to remove roadblocks of burning tyres, fired rubber bullets and tear gas and baton charged. A journalist suffered a rubber bullet injury. The strikers fought to drive back the riot police trying to break up protests.

Taking to the mountains and forests for cover the miners fired "sky rockets" and ball-bearings through pipe to push back the police. Slings, golf ball launchers and home-made device to fire potatoes were also used by the miners to defend themselves. A number of local offices of the ruling Popular Party were attacked.

In Asturias, roads and railways were blockaded in towns and cities including Bendición, Lieres and Campomanes. León experienced more powerful protests. Vehicles were diverted because of the blockade there. At Ciaño, railway line was blockaded. The strikers laid chains across the tracks. Later they lifted the blockade.

In the mines at Candín and Aller, seven miners staged a lock-in. Three of them remained entrenched underground in Aller.

The regional government has asked the conservative central government to reorder its plan for cutting down subsidies to the mining industry.

The strike is the expression of defending rights and existence in the face of capital's onslaught on the working populace. The workers have not only stood for their jobs. They are actually defending the mining industry also.

While capital indulged in speculation with real estate and construction of housing complexes, shopping malls, etc. the workers are struggling for industry. Capital has not turned hostile to mining. It's just trying to intensify process of appropriation: more output with less labor, and have a bigger reserve army of labor to keep labor pressed down.

Not only workers, common people in Spain are also bearing the burden that capital's gamble in the Spanish real estate casino has "constructed".

Citing a report by the Red Cross in Catalonia Europa Press informed: The crisis is affecting family dynamics in Spain. The burden on the elderly is heavy. Financial help from the older generation to the younger has become the only way for many to survive. One in three of the elderly has had to help younger family members. This reality is going on for the last two years. The old are helping with the money they receive from the retirement benefits. One in four elderly citizens has had to house one or more younger members who have come back to family homes. Increases in prices and expenditures have taken away 70% savings of the persons in the age group of over 65 years. Deteriorations of the welfare state, 70% of the respondents perceive, is the cause behind the crisis.

As a consequence of the crisis, the above source said, many elderly persons spend less on food, 20% of the respondents can't afford fruit, meat and fish regularly, and about half of them can't afford to visit a dentist or ophthalmologist. According to a concerned official, about half of them can't afford maintaining an adequate temperature in their houses and 80% of the respondents can't afford expenses related to leisure or spare time activities.

The elderly, the retired section of the society are not spared by capital. Tentacles of appropriation have been spread wide—among the old—although they have left factories, etc. years ago. Consumption of the old is being taxed. Retirement benefits, part of their wages, which was given for necessary labor time and for regeneration of capital, are now being taken back—being snatched away—by capital. Generations—the old, the retired persons, the young—are being appropriated. Capital has capitalized the crisis to intensify its appropriation activities.

Prime minister Rajoy's rightist Popular Party having absolute majority in the parliament and Rubalcaba's Socialist Party, the main opposition party, are in agreement on major issues. The central bank chief had to leave early. Actually the two ruling parties tactfully have not allowed the central bank chief to explain in the parliament the causes of nationalizing the major Spanish bank.

Political storm is gathering in Spain as indulgence and usurpation by the rich and the powerful form one part of the story. The other part, the people, the miners, the working class, their suffering and discontent with awarded austerity are other actors and factors. Recent opinion poll indicates the trend of dissatisfaction.

Euro's political respite in Greece may turn temporary as Spanish problem is still threatening bigger interests. Whatever the outcome the Spanish people's suffering is increasing as is their discontent. There are signs of increasing political crisis in Spain. □□□