

Faced with attacks from all sides, unite and fight as a class!

“Long live the working-class struggle!”
(a slogan from the 12 September demonstration in Madrid)

The eyes of the working class are drawn to the struggle of the Airbus workers. In Spain, as in other countries, inflation is on the rise and our wages are under attack.

And just like the situation of the automotive sector in Germany, mass redundancies are in the pipeline and working conditions are under attack. A growing sense of unease and a determination to fight back have spread across all sectors and in all countries. But the question is: how to fight? We’ve had enough of protests where we are sidelined and have no say in agreements reached behind our backs.

The struggle at Airbus is a working-class struggle. Workers are fighting against the significant loss of income caused by rising prices and against cutbacks to working conditions (to remote working, flexible working hours, holidays, staff canteens). The struggle has arisen from a spontaneous initiative of the workers and has united the different branches, the engineers in the company offices and those working on the production lines. It has created mass assemblies (of up to 1,500 workers) who discuss matters and take decisions by a show of hands, and then send ‘observers’ to negotiate with the company and the government. The struggle has spread from Getafe and Seville to all the factories: Cádiz, Toledo and Albacete. The workers have also organised discussions via social media (Telegram, X) and have set up a website (*Enfadados con Airbus* – ‘Angry at Airbus’) where they publish news on how the struggle is progressing and even the documents of the assemblies.

We should take encouragement and gain confidence from the struggle.

The struggle is running out of steam from being isolated within the sector

Clearly this movement cannot grow and challenge the government’s arbitration if it remains isolated within the sector. After a month and a half on strike, fatigue began to set in and some comrades in the assemblies have said: “We’re leaving because we are exhausted and can’t wait for the next collective agreement”. Although the assemblies did vote to reject the arbitration agreement, the margin was very narrow: it fell from 81 per cent for the first draft agreement to a subsequent 51 per

cent, with an overall majority of just 67 votes (this mainly from Madrid and Seville). Furthermore, even though the decision was to reject the agreement and continue the strike, the strike committee (comprising the UGT, CGT and UTIL) decided to ‘put the strike on hold’, provoking the anger of many comrades: *“I don’t understand what we voted on yesterday. You could call it something else, but we’re back at work and the pressure’s off.”* *“The strike is ongoing and legal as long as there’s no signed agreement on the table. If we put it on hold, it’s a victory (for the government and the company) by technical knockout.”*

Despite their fighting spirit and determination, isolation is a dead end! The historic miners’ strike in Britain in 1984–85 lasted almost a year, led by the workers most seasoned in the struggle and with the majority of mines involved, before they withdrew one after the other; it critically failed to extend the struggle beyond the mining sector.

This defeat played a central (though not exclusive) role in the demoralisation and the absence of any significant workers’ struggles thereafter...up until 2022!

The demonstration on September the 12th in Madrid: the difficulties in extending the struggle

Some, or indeed many, probably thought that this demonstration would spell the end of the struggle. In the end, the UGT did not call for a demonstration, and perhaps a rally involving only a tiny minority of ‘radicals’ was expected (which is how many within the company are labelling those who want to continue the strike). But there were between 5,000 (according to the UGT) and 8,000 (according to the organisers) demonstrators from Madrid (Airbus has 14,000 workers, 9,000 of whom are based in Getafe alone, the company’s largest plant in Madrid), with delegations from other sites present. Whilst the atmosphere was calm at the start, with the workers’ families present in a show of solidarity, anger and defiance remained, manifesting itself in the organisation of a rally of over a thousand people at 2.30 pm under the scorching Madrid sun, in front of the Ministry of Industry, where one of the main slogans was: *“this isn’t the end”*.

The demonstration included delegations (mainly from trade union and political organisations) from the teaching sector, which is currently on strike in various regions (including Madrid), as well as students and social workers. And all the

leaflets distributed called for the extension and coordination of the struggles. Some speakers at the rally even called for a general strike. Everyone was in favour of extending the struggle; but to extend it how?

The trap of the general strike and the ‘coordination of the struggles’

The representative of the teaching platform, *Menos Lectivas* (‘Fewer Teaching Hours’) called for “*co-ordinating all sectors in a general strike*”, for “*Airbus workers to also defend state schools by taking part in the sector’s demonstrations*” and for “*an assembly in every school to decide on its own terms*”. Although this stance shows that there is a desire for solidarity and for broadening the struggle, there is a great danger of falling into the trap of a FALSE EXTENSION. What was called for was simultaneous action and coordination of the struggles; but in essence... everyone in their own corner! Everyone fights ‘their own’ battle, with their own demands, their own representatives and their own meetings, and from there they come together at the odd demonstration, each behind their own banner, until we end up with a ‘sector-by-sector’ general strike. And we’ve seen all this before.

In the struggles against the attack on pensions in France in 2023, the mobilisation was massive, but we had warned that this was not enough: we must take our struggles into our own hands through general assemblies open to all workers. It has nothing to do with closed meetings confined to individual workplaces or sectors, being in charge of ‘their own’ struggle.

To extend the struggle, unite as a class

So, has this been what extending the struggle looks like? No! During the ‘Summer of Anger’ in 2022 in Britain, there was a massive return of the working class to struggle with action taking place simultaneously across many sectors (railways, postal services, education, etc.); but each sector acted on its own. The struggles were unable to unite, to form a social and political force capable of confronting the state and defending workers’ living conditions. In the midst of a massive movement of struggles, the trade unions (and in Britain there is one for every sector and sub-sector) confined each group within the limits of its own specific, particular and differing demands.

In contrast, in Spain, in Vitoria in 1976, workers united their struggle and organised town meetings, putting forward common demands; or in Poland in 1980, when workers from across the country united, electing delegates from the assemblies (known as the MKS) that represented the working class of the entire country. And these are not just stories that grandparents tell their grandchildren. The working class learns from its experiences and passes them down from generation to generation. In the struggle against pension cuts and the raising of the retirement age in France, comrades said: “*If you give us 63 (the retirement age to replace of the previous 60), we’ll give you 68*”, recalling the May 1968 strike involving over 9 million workers.

Extending the struggle means sending picket lines (such as those sent to the Airbus factories to bring the entire site to a

standstill) to all sectors engaged in struggle, organising joint assemblies, unifying demands and electing joint delegates (who can be recalled if they fail to fulfil their mandate) to represent the assembly in negotiations. It means transforming the simultaneous nature of the struggles into genuine unity!

If the Airbus struggle remains confined to its own sector, the energy and fighting spirit will gradually wane; but with the growing number of attacks on workers’ living conditions and the will to fight back growing everywhere, it creates the conditions for a genuine extension of the struggle. This is the only way to stand up for our demands. This applies to all working class struggles that develop in whichever country: hence the importance for everyone to learn from the experience of the Airbus workers’ struggle.

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This is the second leaflet the ICC has produced on this important struggle. The first was ‘Airbus workers’ strike: for solidarity and extension!’ (ICC online, September)

The ICC holds **public meetings in London and online**. For details see our website: **en.internationalism.org** or write to: **uk@internationalism.org**

