

Spanish Strikers At Constitution! 23 February Urging Changes¹⁹⁷⁶ viva!

MADRID (NYT) — Spain's lengthiest and most widespread strike movement in 40 years is now gradually slackening, but its effects on the labor movement are expected to be profound.

The state-run syndicate organization, a pillar of the corporate political system that Franco devised and that is now expected to wither away, was unable and in many cases unwilling to halt the strikes by hundreds of thousands of industrial workers, white-collar employes and government functionaries.

In a country where every institution is being questioned, there is nobody who will openly defend the syndicate organization as it is now constituted.

The highest officials of the state-run syndicates talk of the urgent necessity of reform to make them autonomous and representative. This is implicit recognition that workers are dissatisfied with the present setup and this dissatisfaction is being used by leftist political and labor groups to challenge the syndicates' existence.

Those who oppose the syndicates want to start from scratch with a freely elected trade union congress that would constitute a new labor confederation in Spain. The congress would be the labor counterpart of the Constituent National Assembly, which would abolish the present constitutional laws and build a new political system.

The basic question is credibility. The opposition, whether political or labor, does not believe the government's willingness or ability to carry out significant reform, and in any case finds unacceptable the idea that reform and democracy should be handed down from the top.

Virtually everyone who works in Spain, whether management or labor or self-employed, is a member of the organization, which attempts to abolish class divisions and replace them, under government control, with the idea of economic collaboration. Logically following from this is the outlawing of strikes and, as a counterpart, the difficulty, although not the impossibility, for employers to discharge workers. An elaborate system of labor courts and arbitration procedures is supposed to handle conflicts.

The syndicates have created a large bureaucracy estimated at 15,000 persons with a vested interest in continuity. A budget of more than \$300 million a year covers such diverse activities as housing projects, professional training and recreational facilities. The system is a paternalistic one in which the state cares for the needs of all those who participate in economic production in exchange for what an increasing number of workers think is an alienation of their freedom of choice and action.

Two major principles of the syndicates are now being challenged and are likely to be changed in one way or another. One is the verticle system of control from top to bottom, starting with a Minister of Syndicate Relations who is a member of the government, and descending through a series of councils to a base of tens of thousands of shop stewards. The other principle is the inclusion of management and labor in one organization.

The two principles are being increasingly linked in workers' minds. Under the influence of Marxist-oriented leaders, the idea is being spread that the government, instead of being neutral, protects the capitalist class so that government and management are one and the same enemy.

The strikes brought out clearly that the old idea of class interests and class divisions could not be abolished by law and that to further workers' interests, independence from both management and government was needed. The government often spoke of "subversive" elements at work and management kept talking of manipulation of the strikes by a minority for political interests.

Even syndicate officials took positions critical of government and management policy.

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