

## **Privatisation doesn't work - neither for service users nor workers**

(1st June 2015) Providing quality public services for the benefit of citizens is the principle focus of public service unions in Spain in their continuing struggle to reverse the negative effects of the austerity policy of the Spanish government.

Members of EPSU's network of union journalists visited Madrid last week, meeting union leaders and shop stewards in the tax administration, the health services as well as in water supply and refuse collection companies.

The clear message from all these public sector trade unionists was that the austerity measures of the government and the local and regional authorities in Spain have not only dealt a severe blow to public sector workers' rights but have had an even more severe impact on the users of public services.

The general secretary of the trade union of La Paz General Hospital said that nursing and other staff at the hospital have seen jobs cut from 7000 to less than 6000.

But for the users the cuts have been deeper. Free health treatment was suspended with the a requirement that costs be shared 50-50 between the state and civilians. More severe is the blow on patients who for years in the past enjoyed free medical treatment.

Austerity has also led the regional government to try to privatize the water supply service provided by the Canal Isabel II Company in Madrid and this continues to be an objective by the ruling popular party.

Employees of the company have seen their salaries and other benefits cut and promotion prospects reduced while they are working hard to maintain quality of services. At the same time consumers have been hit by rising prices. With the prospect of privatization, nepotism has also reared its ugly head. However, the trade unions are not sitting on their hands. They are joining forces with others and finding ways to adopt common aims to protect and promote public services, working with sympathetic political parties to lobby Parliament.

There have been some positive results with most political parties undertaking a commitment to work in support of the unions' demands. The latest elections have affected the ruling party which saw its power reduced and even it has agreed to consider the union demands and abandon further negative measures on public services and public services employees.

The EPSU journalists' network attended a training seminar for tax service employees from across Spain held in the framework of a European project, organized by FSP-UGT and EPSU.

Participants heard about the tactics of tax dodgers and various forms of tax evasion and how this must be tackled in order to collect the missing billions that can be used to finance public services. There was a particular focus on the case of McDonald's which has helped open the eyes of national governments to the tax avoidance scandal. The case has also been discussed by the European Parliament while even the European Commission has ordered an investigation.

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