

Spain: Sacked Delphi workers confront trade unions

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A video has appeared on YouTube showing angry clashes between scores of workers who were sacked by the bankrupt motorcar parts supplier Delphi in 2007 and the trade unions that were supposed to represent them.

The incidents took place on February 28 of this year in Cadiz where the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Communist Party-led United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU) coalition regional government or Junta (an institution of government of the autonomous communities of Spain), called a demonstration to mark the 33rd anniversary of the day the region of Andalucia voted to become an autonomous region. It was supported by the main Spanish trade unions, Workers Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers Union (UGT).

The main banner read “For Andalucia. Rights, Employment and Dignity.” The declared aim of the march was to celebrate the region’s autonomous statute and demand the central government abandon its austerity measures, deflecting attention away from the drastic cuts the PSOE-IU Andalucian government has imposed since it came to power last year.

The workers, who call themselves ex-Delphi and who have been fighting for jobs in the six years since they were sacked, demanded the right to head the demonstration. The unions, the PSOE and IU refused, and clashes took place. The riot police were called to separate the sacked workers from the official march and protect it all along the route.

The ex-Delphi workers were corralled into adjacent streets where they kept up their chanting and rebukes. These included, “PSOE—PP [the ruling right-wing party] it’s all the same shit! And United Left? Them too! And the trade unions? Them too!”, “Trade unions: Traitors!”, “CCOO: Traitors”, “More work and fewer crooks”, “We don’t have enough bread for so many chorizos [crooks]”. Then they lined the road on either side of the official march and continued shouting, “You are all rubbish”,

“Shame on you”, “You are all bought off”.

Delphi was spun off from General Motors in 1999 but remained the automaker’s biggest parts supplier. It also sold many of its components to Ford and Mercedes Benz. Altogether, it supplied more than 180 factories worldwide, of which 59 were based in the European Union.

But in 2007, Delphi went bankrupt and closed its door-manufacturing factory in Puerto Real, Cadiz, shedding 1,600 direct jobs and more than 2,500 indirect jobs. This was in breach of an agreement the company had made to keep the factory open at least until 2010 and after it had received more than €25 million in subsidies.

The dismissed workers received compensation, and the regional government promised to retrain them. However, six years after the closure, about 600 still have not been able to find a job. In October 2012, the Junta ended its package of subsidies and training agreed at the closure, and since then, the workers have been classified as unemployed and now live on a pittance.

Union leaders attempted to use the fact that Chinese multinational Beijing West Industries (BWI) bought most of the machinery at Puerto Real and reported that it was interested in starting up business on the Cadiz site to deflect the anger of the workers.

Discussions were held between BWI, the Andalucian Junta and the trade unions last year. They were all counting on the remaining unemployed ex-Delphi workers being so desperate they would accept the derisory conditions agreed by the unions—a salary of €14,000 (US\$19,000) for working 1,890 hours. One UGT representative showed the depths to which the unions had plunged with the statement, “Anything below that is playing with destitution”.

During the negotiations, it was revealed that the Junta was prepared to buy the site for €10 million and give it away to BWI.

Despite all these concessions, the regional government stated in January 2013 that it believed the negotiations with BWI had come to an end. The main problem for the company was that the average €1,000-a-month labour costs being offered by the Junta and unions was still three times the €350 that it has to pay in other countries.

In response, the trade unions staged a token protest. A leader from each of the four trade unions representing the ex-Delphi workers locked themselves in the headquarters of the Junta for a few hours. Eventually, they left voluntarily, declaring they did it for their families. They said they feared that if they had resisted, they would have spent a night in the police station, and in one year, there would be a trial “with all that that would represent”!

Another video <http://www.lavozdigital.es/cadiz/v/20130129/cadiz/desalojan-cuatro-exdelphi-delegacion-20130129.html> shows the hostility of the ex-Delphi workers when one of the trade union leaders, an IU member, tries to justify their action and asks for forgiveness if that is what the workers had expected. The speeches were drowned by denunciations including “Son of a bitch, Go home,” “War” and “You are wearing a policeman’s clothes”.

Every promise and assurance given to the ex-Delphi workers over the six years since the closure of Delphi has been broken. This is under conditions in which unemployment in the province of Cadiz has reached nearly 41 percent, well above the already high national level of 26 percent. Amongst the youth it is 62.5 percent, 7 percent higher than the national average.

At the same time, the unions’ leaders have retained their jobs, fat salaries, government subventions, and big subsistence payments for their side jobs as assessors to companies, and even collect a percentage for every job lost through the administrative “workforce adjustment” schemes (EREs).



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