

Spanish unions agree to shut down Barcelona Nissan plants

Alice Summers
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With unbounded cynicism, Spanish unions have signed off on a deal closing Nissan's three Barcelona factories, directly cutting over 2,500 jobs. A further 20,000 jobs would be lost among subcontractors and supply-chain workers that depend on the auto-plants.

After around 100 days of strike action by Nissan workers, the Barcelona factory committee—run by the Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CC.OO), PROSOE (Socialist Party) General Union of Labour (UGT) and the Union of Workers' Syndicates (USO) unions—came to an agreement with the Japanese transnational on August 5. The plants are to close by December 31, 2021.

The unions universally proclaimed the deal a victory for Nissan workers. Raúl Montoya of the USO declared it a “great agreement” and a “success,” claiming that it saves thousands of jobs. Miguel Ruíz, spokesperson for the Barcelona factory committee, from the Catalan section of the same union, said it enables workers to avoid “traumatic job losses.”

UGT automobile secretary Jordi Camona called it a “good agreement that, for the moment, clears up uncertainty around the future of these jobs.” The CCOO released a statement claiming the deal is a “balanced agreement that, despite all the difficulties, meets the aspirations of the staff.”

It does nothing of the sort. The deal merely adds a further year to the ticking time-bomb of mass firings, postponing approximately 25,000 job losses one year, to the end of 2021.

As part of the deal, unions agreed to force workers back to work at the Barcelona plant from the end of August, ending three months of strike action.

Workers will be encouraged to take “voluntary” redundancies or early retirement, with the factory committee lauding the supposed concessions they had

won for workers opting to do so.

Those taking early retirement will be offered payouts on a sliding scale. Older workers aged over 55—who would find it difficult to obtain other employment—will be offered a pre-retirement plan of 90 percent of their salary up to the age of 63, with workers between 50 and 54 years offered 75 to 85 percent of their salary, according to their age. Workers born after 1970, who do not qualify for the early retirement plan, will be offered 60 days of pay for each year that they worked at Nissan if they choose “voluntary” redundancy.

The unions have hung their sell-out deal on the promise of a “reindustrialisation” plan, which would be a “tripartite parity” commission between the unions, Nissan and local and national government. Its nominal aim is to encourage other companies to take over the three auto plants in Barcelona and continue production. Nissan has apparently pledged to include a clause in any takeover contract with a new company “guaranteeing priority recruitment” to their former employees.

This worthless fraud will not save the livelihoods of thousands of workers. There is no guarantee that the factories will remain open under different ownership; they are to close on December 31, 2021, takeover or no.

The unions have effectively washed their hands of workers, with Nissan employees given little choice but to quietly consent to their dismissal. The unions' negotiation framework has been predicated on the supposed inevitability of the factory closures and on sugaring the bitter pill of job losses that they are forcing workers to swallow.

Moreover, the approximately 20,000 workers not directly employed by Nissan—but outsourced, involved in the company's supply chain or otherwise dependent on the Barcelona factory—get nothing out of the unions'

negotiations. About a dozen other companies work within the Nissan factory, contracting approximately 1,500 workers, with a further 70 companies and thousands of other workers indirectly involved in supplying and operating the plants.

Protests have already broken out among subcontracted workers, who are threatening to prevent the reopening of the Barcelona plant with an indefinite strike. Around 500 workers at Acciona Facility Services, which runs logistics in the Nissan factory, have threatened industrial action against job losses and their exclusion from negotiations. This came after Acciona informed unions it will bring forward the cancellation of its contract with Nissan, due to end in March 2021, to cut redundancy costs. Acciona has filed a redundancy notice for its 580 employees at the Barcelona facility.

Around 300 subcontracted workers also filed a lawsuit claiming that their employment status is an “illegal transfer of workers,” and that they should be considered full employees of Nissan, receiving the same rights and conditions. Employees at maintenance company Segula and canteen facilities company Tecnove also took part in the legal action.

Josep Pérez of law firm Collectiu Ronda, which filed suit on behalf of subcontracted workers, said: “If they work for Nissan, if they manufacture their vehicles and are subject to the company’s rules and whims, they should be recognised for what they are: Nissan workers. ... To normalise the existence of second-class workers, who can be deprived of their rights on the whim of big companies with multi-billion dollar profits, is to attack the working rights of all.”

The betrayal of the Nissan workers exposes middle class pseudo-left forces like the Morenoite Corriente Revolucionaria de Trabajadores (CRT, Workers’ Revolutionary Current) and its website Izquierda Diario, which seek to bolster the unions and demoralize the workers.

While making muted tactical criticisms of the UGT, CCOO and USO and the sell-out deal, they made clear their opposition to an independent perspective for the working class. Seeking to channel workers’ opposition behind a supposedly radical “syndicalist left,” the CRT chided the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) for failing to “openly break with the route map marked out by the majority unions.”

“If the CGT wants to present a different choice to that of the UGT and CCOO,” the CRT advised, “taking on their policies and being a part of this deal of shame will leave it in a very bad position to represent an alternative direction in future conflicts.”

The CGT is not “alternative leadership” for the working class. Its function is to divert workers who are disenchanted with the bigger unions with militant rhetoric. It is no less a creature of the state than its pro-PSOE and pro-Podemos competitors.

In bolstering the CGT, the Morenoites seek to sow illusions in the trade unions, concealing their universal transformation over the past four decades, amid the globalisation of production, into a corporatist arm of the state. The energies of these pseudo-left forces are focused on upholding the domination of Podemos and the union bureaucracy and blocking the development of socialist consciousness in the working class.

While promoting the unions, the CRT calls for the “nationalisation” of the Barcelona plants. If such a demand were to be taken up by the capitalist Podemos-PSOE government, it would not usher in a new golden age for workers, but would be accompanied by calls for further cutbacks to make the factory “viable”. After the 2008 crash, the US government plunged billions of dollars into the auto companies, only to slash wages for new hires by half.

The struggle against job cuts can only be carried forward by breaking with the bankrupt national framework of the trade unions and building an international movement in the working class. The nationalisation of plants under workers control requires unifying struggles in Spain with those of workers in Europe and worldwide against the transnational corporations, which shift production from one country to another to maximise profits. This entails building rank-and-file committees of action, independent of the trade unions, as part of a fight for socialism.



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