

Airbus collaborates with Spanish trade unions to demobilise fight against plant closure

Santiago Guillen
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Workers at Airbus, the world's largest airliner manufacturer, are waging a struggle against the company's decision to close one of its Spanish factories and to use a temporary redundancy scheme to axe 600 jobs nationwide.

The trade unions CCOO, close to the pseudo-left party Podemos, and UGT, close to the Socialist Party (PSOE), are intervening to demobilise workers and facilitate further attacks.

In recent weeks, the company had informally conveyed to the trade unions and different government bodies its decision to close one of its plants in Puerto Real, located in the metropolitan area of the Andalusian city of Cádiz. The final decision to close the plant was ultimately not taken in a meeting last week between Airbus and the trade unions, but the closure is still on the table. The company stated that it had "not made any mention of the closure or non-closure of Puerto Real [factory]" and that "the factory is in a critical situation that requires dialogue with workers and national and local institutions."

This manoeuvre was quickly seized on by the CCOO and UGT to call off the workers' mobilisations that were planned, including a one-day strike that was to begin on April 23 at all Airbus factories in Spain.

Trying to sell this surrender to the company as a great success, CCOO leader at Airbus, Francisco San José, declared that it had been a "small victory of the union and social mobilization against the closure of this plant". He was quick to add that "good conditions have been created to start a conversation [with Airbus], but always maintaining the premise of maintaining employment in the plants of the multinational company in Spain."

For his part, CCOO leader at the factory, Juan Manuel Trujillo, declared "there will continue to be an opportunity for dialogue and negotiation under the axiom that no Airbus plant will be closed, nor will any job in the Airbus group in Spain be lost."

What these union bureaucrats did not disclose is that job losses are already being implemented. In October 2020, CCOO signed a redundancy scheme with management, agreeing to eliminate 1,220 jobs. Last year, 553 jobs were already lost in the defense division, and another 169 will be eliminated this year. In the commercial division, 900 more employees are expected to be laid off this year, while 3,226 are out of work in a furlough scheme that will last until May 31.

The trade unions are therefore already actively collaborating in the destruction of jobs. They have called off industrial action not because any victory has been achieved but, on the contrary, as part of a ploy with Airbus management to demobilize the workers.

This strategy enjoys the full collaboration of the pseudo-left Anticapitalistas, a party that was the chief founder of Podemos in 2014. Last year, amid growing opposition, it decided to leave the PSOE-Podemos government to better suppress workers' struggles from the outside.

The mayor of Cádiz—near to where Airbus is planning the factory closure—and member of Anticapitalistas, José María González, considered it a success that "the Board of Directors has not announced the closure or sale of the plant." This, he said, was due to the "key participation, both of the public administration as well as the different social agents [trade unions]." Andalusian lawmaker José Ignacio García, one of Anticapitalistas' deputies in the regional Andalusian parliament after it broke with Podemos, said "We have achieved a small victory, but we have only bought some time."

Anticapitalistas is intervening to promote illusions in the trade unions and the PSOE-Podemos government. Their real concern is to prevent a social outbreak from taking place in the social powder keg in the region of the Cádiz bay, which has already seen mass layoffs in recent years, including workers at Tabacalera, Delphi, Visteon, Gadir Sola and a long list of other factories and

workplaces.

Growing social discontent was reflected in a large demonstration that took place on April 10, when hundreds of workers and thousands of people from Cádiz protested against the possible closure of the Airbus factory. The closure would mean unemployment for 500 Airbus workers and around 1,000 others who belong to the auxiliary industries that supply the company.

The General Confederation of Labour, CGT, is playing its usual role by making toothless criticism of the larger CCOO and UGT trade unions and making liberal use of radical phraseology and “militant” actions. After CCOO and UGT called off the demonstrations, the CGT called on workers to camp outside the Puerto Real Airbus factory.

Workers at this camp interviewed by *La Voz de Cádiz* said, “There is no success to celebrate... If they had said that Puerto Real is not going to be closed, of course we would celebrate it, but that’s not the case. Those of us who are camping here defend and think that we have to continue with the pressure. We have to keep fighting and fighting, following our calendar of mobilizations”.

Whether the person interviewed was a CGT delegate is not clear, but anger is mounting. According to the worker, “this opinion is not from CGT, we are many colleagues who agree that there is nothing to celebrate.”

Aware of mounting anger, the trade unions once again called token actions. They called one-hour strikes on April 27 and 29 and protests outside Airbus factories across Spain on April 26, 28 and 30. These were solely designed to let off steam in the workforce while Airbus prepares new attacks.

The PSOE-Podemos government has not lifted a finger to support Airbus workers, despite the fact that the Spanish state owns 4 percent of the company's capital in Spain. On the contrary, it sent anti-riot police to repress the protests that have taken place in recent weeks.

Three Airbus workers in Puerto Real, members of the CGT union, were arrested on April 19 on charges of public disorder. At no time were they informed about the specific acts that had given rise to the arrest. Another group of 23 workers was prevented from moving to the Madrid city of Getafe where they intended to hold a protest rally during the inauguration of the new Airbus Campus, in which King Felipe VI was going to participate. The bus was intercepted by heavily armed police and forced to return to Puerto Real.

The CGT showed them the necessary paperwork for the trip under conditions of restricted mobility due to

COVID-19 but, according to the CGT website, “Such permits have been of little use... the police had an express order not to let them pass, ignoring any legal details. It did not matter if they had the necessary papers to make the trip.”

The CGT accepted this major attack on democratic rights without any significant protest. It is not even clear what legal argument the police used to justify their actions. Had they claimed COVID-19 health restrictions, the CGT could have defended their legal right to demonstrate while respecting social distancing. If the police had persisted, it would have been a devastating exposure of the criminal “herd immunity” policy of the PSOE-Podemos government, prioritizing profits over human life. It would have shown how public health restrictions are used as a pretext to de facto ban workers protests even as the government forces millions of workers in non-essential industries to work and children to school, so far costing the lives of over 100,000 people and 3.4 million infections.

The attacks on Airbus workers are not just a problem for those employed in Puerto Real. Last year, the company announced its intention to carry out 15,000 layoffs throughout Europe. Stopping these attacks requires a fighting strategy at an international level. Workers cannot have any confidence in the PSOE-Podemos government or in the trade unions and their pseudo-left allies. The way forward is to create rank-and-file committees, coordinated internationally, to oppose the ruling class and the trade unions. The International Committee of the Fourth International is giving a lead to this struggle with the call for the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

We urge Airbus workers in Spain and across Europe to attend today’s online May Day rally as the basis to take their struggle forward.



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