

Spanish trade unions betray workers at Puerto Real Airbus plant

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Airbus, the world's largest airliner manufacturer, has announced it will close its plant in Puerto Real. It comes barely a month after the Spanish trade unions backed by several pseudo-left groups called off strikes and protests after a meeting between Airbus and the trade unions did not officially announce a plant closure. In unison, they cynically declared it a victory.

The WSWs warned that even though the decision to close the plant had not been announced, "closure is still on the table." It added that the Workers Commissions (CCOO) union, close to the Podemos party, and UGT, close to the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), had "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." The ploy continues to this day.

After calling off the demonstrations, the unions conspired behind workers' backs with the PSOE-Podemos government. A day before Airbus announced the closure of the plant, the government, the CCOO and UGT sent Airbus a proposal making clear their willingness to justify a plant closure and stressing their willingness to "sustain the economic and competitive profitability of the company."

Immediately afterwards, the company announced the plant closure and reopened talks with the trade unions. For their part, the unions proposed "temporarily suspending the calendar of mobilizations, concentrations and non-collaboration with the company." This notably entailed canceling the indefinite strike they had threatened to call on May 24 across Spain's Airbus factories.

This agreement, which the unions hailed as giving "the highest priority to negotiation" and "trust in the will of the parties," was signed by four of the five unions at Airbus-Puerto Real's works council: CCOO,

UGT, SIPA (Independent Union of Aeronautical Professionals) and ATPSAE (Association of Technicians and Professionals of the Aerospace Sector).

These negotiations are a sham. The unions have no intention of defending jobs or the plant. From what has been leaked to the press, the government and the unions have already agreed to close it.

Some are to be fired through "voluntary" redundancies, others will be offered relocation to the Airbus plant in Getafe, south of Madrid and 470 kilometers from Puerto Real—a transfer that is unaffordable for many families due to its economic and social cost. Only a few employees will be reassigned to the other Airbus plant in the province of Cádiz, which is also threatened with closure by the company's plans to centralize production in Madrid.

The unions are implementing a plan, worked out with the PSOE-Podemos government and Airbus, to suppress social opposition in Puerto Real and Cádiz. Located in the region of Andalusia in southern Spain, this area has 27 percent unemployment and over 50 percent among youth. For years it has witnessed the destruction of jobs and factories due to the trade unions' collusion with companies, backed by PSOE regional governments. The latest plant closure means losing, not only the 380 jobs at the plant, but up to 1,520 more in related parts supply and logistics work.

In their closure plans, the government and Airbus are relying on the services of the petty-bourgeois Anticapitalistas tendency. The city of Cádiz is run by Anticapitalistas Mayor José María González. In April, amid rising anger among workers, Anticapitalistas and González intervened in protests to tie workers to the unions, widely promoted the false "victory," thereby helping the unions strangle the strike.

Anticapitalistas is continuing its pernicious role. Teresa Rodríguez, the regional leader and lawmaker in the Andalusian parliament, who is regularly featured in the bourgeois media, stated, “[w]e must defend every industrial job in Andalusia, and we are going to do it together with the workers and trade union organizations.” In fact, her ally is Podemos, of which Anticapitalistas was a part until recently.

Cádiz Mayor González is whipping up nationalist chauvinism, while continuing to promote the PSOE-Podemos government. He called on the government, which owns 4.1 percent of Airbus shares, to become more involved. He said, “[i]f Spain did more in the council, like France or Germany, I am convinced that the workers of Puerto Real would not have to pay the economic damage.”

In fact, as the WSWs recently pointed out in Germany, where Airbus is planning new job and wage cuts, the IG Metall union—like the Anticapitalistas—is clinging to its own nation-state. “If we want to achieve something with Airbus and France, then the right collar size is the Chancellery,” IG Metall board member Jürgen Kerner said last week. This national chauvinist perspective only divides workers along national lines, blocking them from building an international movement to fight the attacks on jobs, wages and living standards.

Although the four main unions in the works council called off strike action, the fifth, the General Labor Confederation (CGT), maintained the strike at the Puerto Real plant called last Friday. This reflected widespread support among workers at the plant for continuing strike action.

The CGT, however, does not represent an alternative. It is playing its usual role of making toothless criticisms of the larger trade unions and making liberal use of radical phraseology and “militant” actions, to tie workers to a nationalist perspective. It specializes in feeding off mass discontent with the betrayals of the larger unions, only to channel it towards empty national appeals. However, it inevitably isolates the plant where workers are in struggle.

Before the plant closure announcement, the CGT’s “militant” action consisted of setting up a camp outside the factory. It then organised protests during the break, so the protests did not disturb Airbus profits.

Now, they are proposing an indefinite strike isolated

simply at the Puerto Real plant currently threatened with closure. They are making no efforts to link up with other workers’ struggles, even though over 30,000 workers are to be made redundant in the coming months at large companies across Spain. The CGT aims to wear down workers with protests and strikes until they accept the plant closure.

The CGT’s ability to maintain any credibility depends largely on the despicable role of pseudo-left forces like the Morenoite Workers’ Revolutionary Current (CRT). Its piece last Friday, titled “Great strike day called by CGT at Airbus Puerto Real despite CCOO-UGT Betrayal” states: “Only the CGT continues to support the fight to defend the Puerto Real plant, while the other unions together with the PSOE-Podemos government are committed to accepting the closure and the destruction of jobs.”

The CRT’s support for CGT aims to dupe workers into believing the unions can be revived to serve workers’ interests. The only problem, they claim, is the bureaucracy and the leadership. Even then, CRT does not hide the fact that it is seeking to cut a deal with the CCOO and UGT bureaucracies. In their words, “[w]e must demand that all unions, especially CCOO and UGT, far from seeking crumbs from an agreement with Airbus, should promote a mobilization throughout Andalusia and call for a general strike in the entire province of Cádiz in defense of Airbus.”

Workers at Airbus cannot pin their hopes on rotten political forces and organisations that betray them and whip up nationalist tensions with their class brothers and sisters in other countries. They need new organs of struggle, independent grassroots committees based on democratic control and the traditions of internationalist and class struggle. We urge Airbus workers to create their own rank-and-file committees and join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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