

Spanish unions, Morenoite CRT sabotage Puerto Real Airbus workers' struggle

Santiago Guillen and Alejandro López
22 June 2021

Last month, Airbus, the world's largest airliner manufacturer, announced its intention to close one of its production facilities in southern Spain, the plant in Puerto Real. The closure is set to destroy nearly 2,000 direct and indirect jobs in an area already suffering 27 percent unemployment.

The larger trade union federations, Workers Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers Union (UGT), intervened claiming they would stop Airbus' plans. In a matter of weeks, however, after a few token demonstrations and stoppages, they submitted an agreement drafted with the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government to Airbus proposing the merger of the two regional plants. The Puerto Real plant is now set to be closed by 2023.

Anger is widespread among workers and across the Bay of Cádiz where the plant is located.

Juan Antonio, a factory worker, told *La Sexta*, "We are not only fighting for our employment, but for the employment of an entire municipality. This [the plant closure] would be the death of the bay."

The wife of one of the workers who has her son doing an internship at the company said, "If the plant closes my son will have no future at 20 years old. He will have to leave to go to work outside. And if they relocate my husband, they would force us all to leave". Another worker, Josemari, told *El Salto* that the major unions "have sold us out".

Under these conditions the smaller General Confederation of Labor (CGT) is intervening to prevent opposition from becoming an open struggle against the trade union bureaucracy and the PSOE-Podemos government. It is being assisted by pseudo-left forces, particularly the Morenoite Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT). The CRT is increasingly recruiting CGT bureaucrats and its online publication, *La Izquierda Diario*, acts as the CGT's mouthpiece.

The CGT's origins lay in a split from the anarcho-sindicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT) in 1979 in order to stand in trade union elections and receiving state subsidies. It acts always as a tool of the large trade union federations. When resistance mounts against their latest treachery, the CGT appears on the scene to corral hostile workers and promote illusions that the CCOO and UGT can be pushed to the "left". Its liberal use of radical rhetoric and occasional militant

"actions" never aim to challenge the CCOO and UGT or to confront the PSOE-Podemos government.

The CRT describes the CGT's role during the Airbus struggle as "the only union that has organized and promoted actions with which the workforce is confronting the employers, the government and the union bureaucracy." This is a fraud.

In April, the CCOO and UGT called off all protests when Airbus did not officially announce the plant's closure. Amid widespread disgust, the CGT set up tents outside the plant that have been manned by militant workers for the past two months. Rallies were held during lunch breaks, ensuring these actions did not affect the profitability of Airbus.

After the larger union federations and the PSOE-Podemos government agreed to the plant closure with Airbus, the CGT organised a protest in Madrid in front of the Ministry of Industry. Its aim was to promote illusions that the PSOE-Podemos government could be pressured into reversing course and maintaining the plant.

Last Friday, the CGT organised what it described as a general strike throughout the province of Cádiz.

The CRT's *La Izquierda Diario* described it as a "success", writing, "The demonstration that began on a rainy day completed its journey with more than 700 protesters, including delegations of Airbus workers from Seville and Getafe who showed solidarity with their fellow Cadiz residents. As for the work stoppage, the strike has stopped not only the Airbus Puerto Real centers and the Bahía de Cádiz Center, but has also spread to Navantía Puerto Real and Alestis with great follow-up."

In reality, the strike was a political fraud. If there was no major industrial activity in Puerto Real and in the large state-owned shipbuilding company Navantía, this was only because, as the CGT and CRT calculated, it was a local bank holiday. In neighboring Cadiz, it was business as usual at Navantía's shipyard.

The CGT had weeks to mobilise its 85,000 members, 7,000 state-subsidised union delegates, and other sympathetic workers against plant closures in the Bay of Cadiz for the strike to be a success. Instead, it called a strike in all Airbus plants in Spain for June 11, and then called its "general strike" in the province of Cádiz on June 18.

The CGT union delegate at Airbus Puerto Real, Juan Antonio Guerrero, blamed the larger unions for the failure to close major industries in the region. He told *Diario de Cádiz* that the other unions were “standing at the door [in Navantia Cádiz] to make a ‘counter picket’ and coral workers inside”. He complained that the larger unions “said that they would join us and today was the day to demonstrate it, but unfortunately they didn’t come”.

The CGT first promoted illusions that the CCOO and UGT can be pushed to the left and then whined pathetically when this mirage failed to come about.

The same lie was advanced by the CRT. Before the strike, they claimed the CGT’s protests were “influencing the bureaucracy of the large trade unions. As the CGT explained in a recent statement, the delegates of CCOO and UGT are debating about whether to join the protests. This would mean a change from their current defense of the agreement [to close the plant]”.

After calling on workers to entrust their fate to the tender mercies of the CCOO and UGT, the CRT then promoted illusions in the PSOE-Podemos government. It wrote, “It seems that the bloc supporting the agreement is breaking up, with the PSOE and Podemos supporting a resolution in the Senate in favour of maintaining the plant.”

This was a lie. Once the cited parliamentary resolution was approved, the CRT was forced to admit, “Although the text seeks to support workers’ demands regarding the maintenance of jobs and workload, as well as demand more jobs in the province”, the Podemos-backed resolution defended the plant closure. They asked Podemos, “How do you accept the shameful agreement of the government, unions and Airbus while claiming to want to defend employment in Puerto Real?”

Workers should rather ask the CRT why they ever gave credence to the posturing of Podemos?

Workers must draw their own lessons. The trade unions, whatever their origin and size, have long ago abandoned any defense of the interests of the workers they claim to represent and function as co-conspirators of corporate management and the state. The plethora of pseudo-left organisations, articulating the social interests of the same privileged layers of the middle class, act as their cheerleaders and ideological apologists.

If workers are to stop the destruction of their jobs and living standards and prevent plant closures like Airbus is planning in Puerto Real, they must strike out on a new course:

Rank-and-file committees must be formed independent of the trade unions. The CCOO, UGT and CGT are not workers organisations, but arms of the ruling class to implement austerity, axe jobs and impose wage cuts. Workers at every plant and workplace should hold meetings to elect rank-and-file factory committees from among their most trusted colleagues.

Workers’ struggles must be united. Tens of thousands of workers are facing similar plant closures, redundancy schemes, and attacks. It is estimated that only in the first months of this

year, 35,000 workers are threatened with redundancy. In the banking sector alone there are 18,000 layoffs being prepared. This is on top of the wage cuts, casualisation and layoffs that will escalate after furlough schemes affecting 900,000 workers end in late September. Rank-and-file committees should establish network alliances across industries and with all sections of workers coming into struggle to coordinate joint action.

Every fight by workers must be guided by an international strategy. The Airbus Puerto Real struggle is one component of the global upsurge of class struggle. Yet the unions have refused to coordinate the strike actions even with other plants throughout Europe, despite the fact that Airbus announced its intentions to cut 15,000 jobs globally last year. The only way to defeat such a massive transnational corporation is on the global arena—uniting not only Airbus workers but all workers now in struggle.

The working class needs a socialist perspective and political party. In seeking to defend their interests, Spanish workers confront a bitter enemy in the PSOE-Podemos government, which has conspired to close the plant and then sent hundreds of police officers against protests and strikes. The PSOE-Podemos government, which is implementing ruthless austerity, attacks on democratic rights while showering corporations and banks with billions, is no less ruthless than its right-wing counterparts. The pseudo-left tendencies like the CRT have shown themselves to be appendages of the PSOE-Podemos government and the trade union bureaucracy. To secure their interests, workers must build their own party, a Spanish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, to fight for socialism.

For more information visit “Build rank-and-file safety committees!”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact