

Spain's UGT union holds sham vote at Ford-Valencia to ram through cuts

Alejandro López
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Last week, Spain's social democratic General Union of Workers (UGT) organised a fraudulent vote at the Almussafes Ford plant in Valencia, aiming to divide Ford workers across national lines and justify imposing a concessions contract on Ford workers in Spain.

Ford aims to completely convert its production to electric vehicles by 2030. Exploiting this to slash jobs, down wages and working conditions, Ford Europe has demanded that the plants at Almussafes, Spain and Saarlouis, Germany each submit proposals for the largest possible cuts to wages and conditions. This will then be presented to Ford headquarters in Detroit, with the "losing" plant facing closure after 2025, threatening tens of thousands of jobs in Spain's Valencia or Germany's Saar region.

Manoeuvring behind the backs of the workers, the UGT demanded that workers vote on their proposal to Ford management, without revealing the full text of their proposal. However, the deal, which UGT officials presented to executives at Ford-Europe headquarters in Cologne, undoubtedly includes historic attacks on workers in exchange for keeping electric car production. The UGT refuses to disclose the full agreement on the reactionary pretext that this would jeopardise its position in the bidding war aimed at shutting the German plant.

Workers must demand to see the full text of the concessions the Spanish union bureaucracy is telling Ford management that it will accept in Valencia, and reject the unions' attempts to pit Spanish, German and other workers against each other in a race to the bottom in wages and conditions.

UGT bureaucrats have only told workers what is in a seven-minute video posted on YouTube. Press reports indicate, however, that the UGT is advocating the most savage attack on Ford workers in the Valencia plant's

46-year history. These include:

- A wage freeze for the next four years. With inflation above 6 percent, this means a drastic salary cut of around 11 percent by 2026, according to sources at Ford Valencia.
- The extension of daily working time by 15 minutes. The additional work time adds up to over 80 hours a year per employee, or a half-million unpaid hours per year in total.
- Working on Saturdays for up to 18 days a year.
- The introduction of flexible night shifts.

The UGT claims 75 percent of workers voted to support the highlights of the agreement, on a participation of 4,193 workers or 70 percent of the total, while 948 (22.61 percent) rejected it. However, with the UGT keeping workers in the dark about what they were voting on, the vote could only be an illegitimate, anti-democratic charade.

The union forced workers to vote via a UGT app, rejecting traditional ballot votes. It was thus impossible to count the vote, and some Ford workers told the WSWS it was possible to vote multiple times on the app.

Ludicrously, the UGT tried to claim that they used the app to allow for remote voting to protect workers' safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This pose of concern for workers' health was a transparent fraud. For two years, the UGT has been at the forefront of school reopenings and forcing workers back into factories and offices that became the main spreaders of COVID-19. Spain has suffered over 122,000 excess deaths and seen at least 11 percent of its population infected during the pandemic, as the ruling Podemos and Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), to which the UGT is affiliated, placed profits over lives.

Once the vote was announced, the UGT sent dozens

of its company-funded bureaucrats into the plant to force workers to register for the UGT's sham vote. Workers had to give their full names, ID number and email addresses. This meant that the union bureaucrats—who influence decisions on promotions, bonuses and other benefits via back-channel talks with management—could see how each worker voted in the app.

At the same time, the union continued its month-long campaign of intimidation, insisting that either workers accept the deal or the plant would close. The UGT stressed that Ford had imposed over 12,000 layoffs in Europe over the past three years, omitting its own role in supporting 630 job losses last April.

To pre-empt opposition to the sham vote, the union posted a video on YouTube featuring an attack on the WSWS for opposing its reactionary collaboration with Ford management. The WSWS has consistently opposed both the German and Spanish unions, who are all participating in a bidding war organized by Ford management against the workers, and has fought to unite Ford workers across national borders.

Workers in Germany have created the Rank-and-File Committee at Saarlouis plant in Germany. The Committee is seeking to unite workers in both plants, demanding the disclosure of all concessions offered by the unions; an immediate halt to secret negotiations by the works council and management; and cooperation at all locations to defend jobs, wages and social gains.

In its video, however, the UGT states: “During this last season you will have heard a lot of news about the situation and future of our factory, opinions and doubts about our ability to negotiate good agreements, and also criticism, and some on the margin of reality.” As it reads out this sentence, the video shows a WSWS article on Ford posted on January 24.

The video then defends its “discreet” negotiations with management, i.e., negotiations behind the backs of workers, before warning workers not to strike or make “noise.” It states: “Where there are agreements [with management], there is a future. And where there is noise, there is uncertainty and even [plant] closures.” It then shows pictures of protests and closures of Ford plants at Genk, Belgium and Blanquefort, France.

Ford workers told the WSWS how the union worked through to ram through the concessions while keeping workers in the dark about what was taking place.

One worker, with a decade of experience on the assembly line, said he voted for the agreement, despite his reservations. About the agreement, he said, “There has been a lot of fear and a lot of silence. People are very nervous. ... We don't know what is best and how to achieve it.” This father of two said that “we voted with insecurity” and was angry at being forced to accept wage cuts while Ford reaps massive profits.

He added that even if the Almussafes plant “won” this Hunger Games-style competition against Saarlouis, it would be soon pitted against factories in Romania, Turkey or India.

The UGT uses such Mafia-style tactics because they know how unpopular the deal really is. As one worker told the WSWS, “If they knew they had full support for the agreement, they would have disclosed it fully and called a referendum.”

Fighting back requires coordinating internationally the Ford workers' struggles against management and the various national union bureaucracies. In Germany, workers in Saarlouis have formed an independent rank-and-file committee, fighting to oppose the cuts and unite with their class brothers and sisters in Spain. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers in Valencia to oppose the UGT's filthy manoeuvres, contact the rank-and-file committee in Saarlouis, and build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to organize the fightback against Ford.

To contact the WSWS about the Ford struggle, send a WhatsApp message to +491633378340.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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