

Spain UGT union cuts wages at Ford's Valencia-Almussafes plant

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On Wednesday, Spain's social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT) and Ford-Spain signed the 18th Collective Agreement for the plant at Almussafes, Valencia. It is the most savage attack on workers in the Valencia plant's 46-year history. Worked out between the unions and Ford management, it slashes wages and divides Ford workers in Europe across national lines in order to profit massively from the transition to manufacturing electric vehicles.

Ford aims to completely convert production in Europe to electric vehicles by 2030. Ford Europe has demanded that the plants at Almussafes, Spain and Saarlouis, Germany submit proposals for the largest possible cuts to wages and conditions. This will be presented to Ford headquarters in Detroit next month, with the "losing" plant facing closure after 2025, threatening tens of thousands of jobs in Spain or Germany.

The Collective Agreement was signed behind the backs of the workers by the director of the Almussafes plant, Dionisio Campos, and on the UGT side, the president of the Company Committee, Carlos Faubel, and the secretary, José Luis Parra.

The unions have refused to disclose the Collective Agreement draft to auto workers, only giving them the main highlights. On Monday, UGT and management gave the minority unions only 24 hours to study the Collective Agreement before it was submitted to a vote in the UGT-controlled Company Committee and signed on Wednesday. The minority unions also refused to disclose the agreement to workers.

UGT sources told the news agency EFE: "The agreement should make it possible for Almussafes to be the successful bidder for the two models of electric vehicles that Ford will manufacture in Europe, which the German plant in Saarlouis is also trying to do."

The Collective Agreement includes the so-called Electrification Agreement between the UGT and Ford Europe made last January 27 in Cologne. The resulting agreement promises savage cuts in exchange for securing the production of new electric vehicles:

- A wage freeze for the next four years that means staggering cuts to real wages as inflation skyrockets. With the latest Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures from Spain showing inflation at 9.8 percent, this would mean a loss of 20 percent or more in workers' purchasing power by the end of 2026.

- The extension of daily working time by 15 minutes and the cutting of 4 vacation days. Workers would be working an additional 11 days per year.

- Work on Saturdays for up to 18 days a year. Eight of these Saturdays will have no additional weekend bonus pay.

- The introduction of flexible night shifts.

Given the sharp rise in the cost of food, fuel, housing and other basic necessities, with inflation standing at nearly 10 percent, workers will suffer thousands of euros in wage cuts. Sources at Ford confirmed that the wage cut would be around €4,000 for just this year alone.

Last February, the UGT submitted this agreement to a sham vote. With the full text unavailable, workers were kept in the dark, and the vote could only be an anti-democratic charade. Workers were forced to vote via a UGT app, rejecting traditional ballot votes which have existed since the factory was established in the 1970s. It was thus impossible to count the vote; Ford workers told the WSWS it was possible to vote multiple times on the app.

Once the vote was announced, the union sent dozens of its company-funded bureaucrats into the plant to force workers to register. 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.

To pre-empt opposition to the sham vote, the UGT posted a video on YouTube attacking the WSWS for opposing the union’s reactionary collaboration with Ford management. The WSWS has consistently opposed both the German and Spanish unions, who are all participating in a bidding war organised by Ford management against the workers. The WSWS, on the other hand, has fought to unite Ford workers across national borders against wage cuts and plant shutdowns.

This vote is currently in court after the minority Union of Metal Workers (STM) challenged the minutes of the Company Council composed of unions and management that approved the agreement on February 14. The STM claims the vote was done “with a lack of transparency.”

If Ford Spain does not obtain the contract, UGT is preparing to close the Almussafes plant. According to the Collective Agreement, if Valencia does not “win” the electric vehicle bidding contest, workers will be pacified with a wage increase at the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1 percent for 2022. Given the annual rate of the general CPI in March was 9.8 percent, a record not seen since 1985, this would mean an 11 percent increase only valid for 2022. Between 2023 and 2024, wages will not be tied to inflation, which means real wage cuts in the face of inflation.

The UGT has a long track record in imposing job losses. In April 2021, it agreed with management to make 600 workers redundant.

The union is now working with the German unions in the European Works Council of Ford to block any united struggle of workers against the bidding war and planned plant closures. Like its German counterparts in the IG Metall who run the works council in Ford Saarlouis, the UGT fears that the workforce will organise itself independently and conduct a real struggle against the threatened plant closure, against job cuts and wage reductions.

An unnamed UGT official told *Europa Press* that Ford’s decision “will be fundamental, as there will only be cars for one of the two factories.” The official

added, “At the meetings of the European Works Council of Ford, we are making an effort to try to convince management to look for viability alternatives for the plant that will inevitably stop manufacturing cars.” Indicating agreement to job cuts and plant closures, the official said that once Ford’s decision is known in June, ‘it will be necessary to search for solutions for surplus personnel that will be produced in Europe as a consequence of this transformation.’”

In other words, the German and Spanish unions represented on the European Works Council will keep playing off German and Spanish workers against each other. Whichever union does not impose large enough wage cuts to keep its plant open will help the company slash jobs and likely close its plant.

This utterly reactionary role of the unions underscores the necessity of the call by the Ford Rank-and-File Committee in Saarlouis for an independent fight by workers in both Germany and Spain to defend jobs. It is demanding an immediate halt to the bidding war, the disclosure of all agreements or declarations of intent made so far and the withdrawal of all concessions.

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.



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