

Ford Europe prepares job cuts with union support in Spain, Germany

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Ford Europe has announced it will impose savage attacks on workers' wages and conditions irrespective of which plant—Almussafes in Spain or Saarlouis in Germany—“wins” the inter-company bidding war supported by both German and Spanish trade unions.

The announcement confirms the warnings of the WSWS. Since Ford announced the bidding war in December 2021, the WSWS has called on workers to reject the blackmail and brutal competition being instigated by the trade unions between workers in different plants, insisting that playing one off against the other would only lead to disaster and open the door to a downward spiral without end. In the end, there will be no “winning” factory.

The WSWS has insisted that the only way workers in Germany, Spain and internationally can defend jobs is through a common struggle together against the trade unions and works council representatives, who have pushed through all the corporation's attacks against the workforce in recent years with their nationalistic divide-and-rule policies. The warnings of the WSWS have been fully substantiated.

In an open letter addressed to the workforce, the president of Ford Europe, Stuart Rowley, warned that “it is foreseeable” that both plants “must undergo a resizing of their current structure,” irrespective of which factory produces the new electric cars for Ford Europe. “Both Saarlouis and Valencia are expected to undergo downsizing from their current structure. Exact details will not be available until we have selected a preferred plant,” added Rowley. That date is June 2022.

Rowley cynically stated that winning a factory will not mean “a decision to close” the losing plant, since the multinational is “actively looking for future opportunities for the plant that is not selected,” something that will require “an effort that includes multiple parties, including local and national governments.” Rowley also noted that

job cuts “will be a difficult process for many employees involved.”

In other words, Ford Europe will implement massive job cuts on the losing plant, while the winning one will have “won” thanks to the union-sponsored wage slashes and worsening of work conditions. Rowley's claims that plant closure is not on the table must be taken with a grain of salt. Over the past decade, production has already been halted in Belgium, France and Wales, and four plants have been closed in Russia. Just recently, Ford announced it was ending production in India and Brazil.

Rowley also noted that “regardless of the plant that is ultimately selected, it is important to remember that it is not yet a product investment decision” and that after the selection of the plant it will be “a lot of work to be done to secure the product for Europe.” This means that even the winning plant will be called upon to make additional cuts to secure Ford's investments in the factory.

Rowley's letter underscores the reactionary role of the trade unions and the dead end of a national perspective for struggle. Both IG Metall in Germany and the General Union of Workers (UGT) in Spain have collaborated with the company's plans, supporting Ford's bidding war. The unions' strategy has meant that not only one of the factories may close, but the “winning” one will fire additional workers in addition to suffering other labor and salary cuts on top of those previously agreed with those same unions.

In Germany, IG Metall has not provided any details of its offer. It is known that it has offered to include all workers in Germany in the cuts, including, besides those in Saarlouis, at the main plant in Cologne that employs 21,000.

In Spain, the UGT, the majority union in the Valencian factory, signed the so-called electrification agreement with Ford management by which it agrees to reduce wages, make work shifts more flexible and increase the

working day by 15 minutes. With the current inflation rate, workers could lose €4,000 this year alone with the application of the electrification agreement.

The union has refused to hold a vote on the agreement, fearing mass opposition. To save face, the UGT organised a fraudulent consultation where the workers had to register with their name and ID to vote electronically through an application controlled by the union itself so that their vote would be known to the union bureaucrats, exposing them to possible future retaliation.

The agreement has been denounced by the local metalworkers union STM together with the other two minority unions, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and Workers Commissions (CCOO). However, these unions don't oppose the bidding war. STM said, "we ask that the parties sit down again to have another agreement that does not leave the workers so badly off." That is, they accept the framework of the attacks—the bidding war with Saarlouis—but are hoping for marginally better terms.

Since Rowley's letter, the unions have continued shamelessly serving business interests. The European Works Council run by the UGT and IG Metall have ludicrously called for 30-minute stoppages to let off steam.

These stoppages are not even meant to oppose the announced job cuts but to "alert the local and European Ford management before resorting to the current legislation in each country [to enforce job cuts] to commit to seeking all possible solutions and on a voluntary basis." The unions state they are "aware" that "once the transformation towards electrification begins, a high surplus of personnel will be generated throughout Ford Europe."

That is, they support the measures proposed by Ford and only ask that before dismissing workers, they make the cuts in staff through voluntary redundancies if possible.

None of this is new. The trade unions have been preparing these cuts together with the company management for a long time. In November 2020, the European Works Council already signed a declaration with Ford committing "wherever it is necessary to make staff adjustments," but "to the extent possible, apply a voluntary approach."

But voluntary dismissals, if they finally occur, are not a solution and will hardly limit the broader catastrophe. A 2016 study by the European University of Valencia indicated that for every job created at the Almussafes plant, another 5.8 are created in the Valencian

Community and 11.7 in Spain as a whole. Thus, the 6,038 Ford Almussafes workers generate some 70,644 jobs in Spain. Thus any reduction in the workforce will have a significant impact on Valencia, just like closures or job cuts in Saarlouis would devastate the working class in Germany.

Last March, the *Economia Digital* newspaper published leaked information from the company indicating that, although Almussafes would manufacture the new Mustang electric vehicle model from 2026, 3,000 jobs—half the workforce—would be lost.

For workers to fight Ford Europe and defend their jobs and purchasing power, it is essential to break with the rotten union bureaucracies and organise an independent struggle, uniting workers in Spain, Germany and internationally.

The Ford Rank-and-File Committee in Saarlouis has called for an independent struggle uniting workers in both Germany and Spain against job cuts and plant closures. The union bureaucracies like Ford management are terrified of a united struggle in the working class. In response, in a video published in February to justify its anti-worker role, the UGT slandered the WSWS, which supports the Ford Rank-and-File Committee in Saarlouis, accusing its coverage of falsifying the content of the negotiations.

Against the slanders of the union bureaucrats who negotiate behind workers' backs, the Ford Rank-and-File Committee 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.



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