

Amazon, Spanish union bureaucracy work to close Martorelles facility

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The e-commerce giant Amazon is set to close its logistics hub in Martorelles, north of Barcelona, cutting 800 jobs. The 30,000 square meters plant at Martorelles, opened in October 2017, is set to close on April 22.

This comes after Amazon announced the lay-off of 18,000 people worldwide in early January. In an update published on the company news site, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy wrote that, including the layoffs announced in November, “we plan to eliminate just over 18,000 roles.” Jassy said that the “majority of the role eliminations are in our Amazon Stores and PXT organizations.”

The planned closure of Martorelles is the latest in a global onslaught on tech and e-commerce jobs, after Google’s parent company, Alphabet, announced 12,000 US layoffs earlier this week.

Amazon aims to fire workers without the expenses associated with the collective dismissal process, in Spain. To do this, it is cynically offering workers the possibility of relocating to the new logistics centers to be built in Girona or Zaragoza, 100 and 300 kilometres away, respectively, from the current plant. Amazon will offer a lump sum of €3,000 to workers agreeing to move to the new logistics center opening in Zaragoza and €1,500 to those who move to the one in Figueres.

Such empty offers would force workers to leave their current residence to work for little more than €1,000 per month. The single payments of €1,500 or €3,000 would not even cover the housing and transportation expenses associated with this move. Amazon thus clearly expects most workers to resign voluntarily, to save costs.

To employees who do not accept the transfer, Amazon proposes the legal minimum: compensation of 20 days per year worked, with a maximum of 12

months.

The company's majority union, the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT), close to the ruling Socialist Party (PSOE), is actively collaborating with this policy. The UGT bureaucracy accepts the company's plans without objection, cynically declaring that 'the forecast is that all the workers will be transferred.' Promptly contradicting themselves, however, they recognize 'that not everyone will accept the company's conditions.'

It ultimately proposes to do nothing beyond begging the Martorelles City Council and the Catalan government to look for ways to employ the logistics center that will remain empty.

Anyone tempted by such illusions should examine the examples of the recent mass layoffs at Nissan, where the Podemos-linked CCOO union and UGT signed off on a deal closing Nissan’s three Barcelona factories, affecting 23,000 jobs. In that case too, the unions encouraged voluntary redundancies while promising a “reindustrialisation” plan after Nissan left. The plan was a total fraud that did not save the livelihoods of workers but aimed only to prevent an explosion of working class opposition.

There is no guarantee that warehouse will remain open under different ownership after April 22.

The UGT bureaucracy functions as a tool of management. While it works with Amazon to close the plant in Martorelles, in Zaragoza, where the activity of the Martorelles facility will be moved, it welcomes Amazon's decision. It exulted that the new plant will 'consolidate in Zaragoza as a center of logistics, but also as a benchmark in working conditions and compliance with labor legislation’.

Workers in Martorelles have refused to accept the plant closure. Anger is mounting. On Sunday, 500

workers met at a town hall to discuss subsequent actions. The UGT president of the works committee at the plant, Esther Rodríguez, blocked any discussion of strike action, arguing that they had to 'continue negotiating' with Amazon.

Rodríguez stated that their first meeting last Thursday 'was only to deliver documentation' and that they want to wait for the meeting called for today 'to see how negotiations flow.' She has admitted that the atmosphere among the workers "is very hot" because 'what the company offers is peanuts.' For this reason, she admits that the workers 'are willing to make mobilizations.' If they finally take strike action, she said, it will be on January 31 and extend another 30 days.

The UGT is thus preparing to isolate and wear down workers at Martorelles targeted by the plant closure, with an extended strike isolated by other Amazon workers across Spain and internationally. These workers systematically suffer low wages, precarious working conditions and Amazon's utter indifference to workers' lives and health.

This took stark and deadly form in December 2021, when six US workers died at the Edwardsville, Illinois fulfilment centre as Amazon refused to stop work despite tornado warnings. "Amazon won't let us go," read the final text message sent by one of the deceased workers.

The UGT bureaucracy has not even attempted to call for support from Amazon's 7,000 workers in Catalonia, 3,000 of them in its center in El Prat, Spain's largest. In the Trápaga logistics center in the Basque province of Vizcaya, workers went on four one-day strikes, from October to December, against precariousness and working conditions and for higher wages. Like the UGT, the Basque separatist unions LAB and ELA refused to call for broader mobilization coordinated with workers at other Amazon facilities.

For workers at Martorelles, their best allies are their colleagues in Spain and internationally, and masses of workers entering into struggle for higher wages and better working conditions, including teachers, health care workers, cabin crews, air traffic controllers.

In the United Kingdom, where hundreds of thousands of workers are involved in strikes, Amazon has announced the closure of its stores in Doncaster, Hertfordshire and Gourock, affecting 1,300 workers.

As in Martorelles, Amazon seeks to carry out hidden job cuts by closing centers and offering transfers to workers that they cannot accept.

Steve Garelick, an official of the GMB union in Britain, reproduced the UGT's self-contradictory arguments in Martorelles when he said "hard-up Amazon workers can't suddenly be expected to up sticks and move to a different fulfilment centre which may be many miles away. Local workers may not be in a position to take roles so far away from where they live."

The plant closures and layoffs at Amazon are not isolated events, but part of a global offensive by the ruling class to put the cost of the crisis on the backs of the workers. To stop this offensive, it is necessary to give a global response, breaking with the narrow nationalist framework imposed by the union bureaucracies such as the UGT or GMB on the class struggle.

The way forward for Amazon workers in the Spain, the UK and internationally lies in the formation of rank-and-file committees to lead coordinated action across the company globally and in the wider logistics and distribution sector. Amazon uses its global financial status to leverage favourable deals with national and local governments to enforce dictatorial conditions in its warehouses.

Its employees must leverage their own position, as one of the largest global workforces, to defend jobs and conditions and fight back against the onslaught of the banks and the employers. This is the only way forward to secure a genuine cost-of-living pay increase, regulation of hours, workloads and workplace safety, and full benefits including sick pay, maternity leave and pensions.

To aid in this fight, the World Socialist Web Site publishes the International Amazon Workers Voice newsletter, informing and connecting workers all over the world. Sign up and get in touch today.



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