

Spanish Amazon workers launch indefinite strike against closure of Martorelles facility

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Amazon workers launched an indefinite strike last week against the decision of the e-commerce giant 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.

The company claims that it will relocate employees to centers in other cities. The truth is that this closure will mean the dismissal of most of a workforce that cannot relocate to towns like Girona or Zaragoza, hundreds of kilometers away. It is only offering reallocations to the Barcelona plants, the closest to Martorelles, to 190 workers, 20 percent of workers at the plant.

What Amazon is proposing is not reallocation, but a collective dismissal, minus the economic and image costs that this would entail. These are the main concerns of the e-giant with a current \$1 trillion market capitalization.

The company refuses to provide any reasons for the closure, claiming it is simply part of its 'business strategy'. The underlying causes, however, are very clear. By transferring the center to the province of Zaragoza, the company will save around 30 percent in wages or more. Indeed, Amazon does not have its own collective agreement, and workers' contracts are governed by province-level agreements. The one in Zaragoza being has worse working conditions and lower wages than those in Barcelona, where the town of Martorelles is located.

Workers would also lose other advantages in the Barcelona agreement, such as night-time bonuses or weekends.

If a company with 20,000 employees in Spain and dozens of centers across the country does not have its own collective agreement that guarantees minimum

salary and working conditions to its workers, this is due above all to the role of the trade unions. They have systematically worked with Amazon to impose low wages, precariousness and abusive practices which have maimed and injured thousands of workers for years, while making Amazon shareholders extremely wealthy.

Workers do not receive any danger bonus, though they operate heavy machinery and are subjected to very harsh control mechanisms to check their movements and evaluate their productivity.

The salary cut will be especially harsh for low-level employees who will go from earning 1,500 euros a month to only receiving the minimum wage of 1,050 euros. After the strike began, the company offered workers a single payment of 6,000 euros in compensation—a figure that, even with this increase, will hardly allow them to address the economic cost of moving to live with a salary much worse hundreds of kilometers from their homes.

Those who do not agree to be transferred will be fired with compensation of 23 days per year worked, well below what they would receive for a normal dismissal. Amazon is thereby saving 20 to 30 million euros in compensation.

'How am I going to go to Zaragoza or Figueres to work if I just bought a flat?' a worker who joined pickets in Martorelles told *EIDiario.es*. Another said, 'they disrespect us, they are abusing us.'

A working mother of two children commented that she could not even consider transferring and that, furthermore, 'Nobody assures me that in a few years they will not do the same to me again and they will leave me on the street.' She stressed that 'No transfer, this is a covert closure.' Another worker pointed out that 'This Christmas they told us that we had broken the

production record and after a week we found out that they were going to close.'

Under mounting pressure, the union bureaucracies called for strike action. Initially, the main union at the Martorelles plant, the social-democratic UGT close to the ruling Socialist Party (PSOE) party, accepted the closure. The UGT promoted illusions in Amazon, stating 'that the company will present viable and fair options' to workers who were sacked.

On January 23, two weeks after the closure was announced, the UGT still refused any call to strike, let alone mobilize broader layers of workers at Amazon and in other firms against the shutdown.

The president of the works council Esther Rodríguez called to 'continue negotiating' and meet with the company 'to see how the negotiations flow.' Rodríguez confirmed that the environment 'is very hot' because 'what the company offers is a trifle.' As a result, she said, workers 'are willing to make mobilizations.' It was the union leaders who were not willing to mobilize the workers and continued to postpone strike action.

The union bureaucracies only proposed that workers be relocated to centers in the same province and improve compensation for dismissal or transfer, but they refused to oppose the plant closure, which will have harsh consequences throughout the town. Besides the 800 direct jobs, hundreds of indirect jobs will be lost in addition to all the public investments that were made as the Amazon plant was installed in Martorelles in 2017—barely five years ago.

Despite the harsh working conditions across Amazon plants in Spain and internationally, the union bureaucracies are working to isolate the Martorelles workers. The UGT branch in Amazon's Zaragoza facility even gave the go-ahead to the closure in Martorelles. It celebrated the transfer of the plant to that city, declaring that it is 'consolidating Zaragoza as a logistics center, but also as a benchmark in working conditions and compliance with labor legislation'.

Next Tuesday, the sixth meeting between the unions and Amazon will be held in the headquarters of the Labor Department of the Catalan regional government, which is acting as a mediator. This is the same place where mediation took place at Nissan's Barcelona factory in August 2020. Then, with unbounded cynicism, the union bureaucracies signed off on a deal

closing Nissan's three Barcelona factories, directly cutting over 2,500 jobs. A further 20,000 jobs have been lost among subcontractors and supply-chain workers that depend on the auto-plants.

Workers must assimilate the lessons of these struggles. Amazon, like Nissan before it, is launching a global offensive against workers. Only in January, 18,000 Amazon employees were laid off worldwide. This does not include concealed layoffs such as those of Martorelles or those being carried out in England with similar strategies in Doncaster, Hertfordshire and Gourock affecting 1,300 workers. Like in Martorelles, they are being fired indirectly, with offers of unaffordable transfers.

Such a global offensive can only be responded to by uniting workers in Spain, Britain and all Amazon centers around the world in a joint fight to defeat the company's attacks. This is something that the unions cannot and will not do. Their vested interests lie in working with Amazon to make "its" workers more profitable for the company, whether between cities like Zaragoza or Barcelona, countries within Europe, or at a global level.

The International Amazon Workers Voice is assisting workers in building a network of rank-and-file committees in the warehouses and terminals to establish lines of communication between workers at different locations and organize collective resistance to the company's diktat. These committees assert workers' control over pick rates and delivery rates and organize strikes against threats to workers' health and safety. They can form the basis for broadening the struggle and support of workers at Martorelles among Amazon workers across Spain and internationally.



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