

Trade unions support Ford Valencia scheme to lay off 1,144 workers

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Ford Spain has announced a savage redundancy scheme to lay off 1,144 workers, or 20 percent of its workforce, at its plant in Almussafes, Valencia. Just hours after the announcement, the trade unions signalled their readiness to work with management to impose these attacks in the space of three months.

The cut is a devastating exposure of the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government which has showered Ford with billions of euros in tax benefits and claimed that attacks against working conditions were necessary to attract supposed investments to preserve jobs.

Above all, it has exposed the German and Spanish trade unions which organised last year's fratricidal competitive bidding contest between Almussafes plant against Ford's Saarlouis plant in Germany. The one who imposed the most savage attacks on its workforce would secure the contract to produce electric vehicles, and supposedly, preserve the plant's future and jobs. Almussafes "victory" has only meant a new round of attacks, as the WSWs warned.

The savage cuts were expected for months. The Almussafes factory will stop producing the S-Max and Galaxy models in April because Ford is accelerating its strategy towards the total electrification of its passenger vehicles in 2030 and of its entire portfolio in 2035. Thus, the Almussafes factory will keep the production of only the Kuga, accounting for 62 percent of the more than 245,000 cars assembled in Valencia in 2022. The factory also assembles the Transit Connect but will stop making the version for the European market at the end of this year.

It is clear that this is just the start of the job onslaught. Last November, Martin Sander, director of Ford's electric car division in Europe, said that electrification would mean a reduction in jobs

compared to combustion vehicles. "The time it takes to produce an electric vehicle is significantly less than the time it takes to produce a combustion engine vehicle. Depending on who you ask, it's somewhere between 30-50%, so we'll need less capacity to build vehicles in the future. That is a reality."

Thousands more jobs are under threat. According to the Valencian Association of the Automotive Industry (AVIA), Ford's operations are responsible for nearly 25,000 direct jobs in the region of Valencia, many of these are linked to the combustion vehicles.

Already in February, Ford Europe announced 3,800 job cuts across Europe over the next three years. In Germany, 2,300 jobs are to go and 1,300 in Great Britain.

The trade unions are not only refusing to mobilise workers in defence of jobs. Instead, they have long agreed to the cuts behind the backs of the workforce and immediately announced their readiness to work with Ford management to impose them through so-called voluntary redundancies.

The UGT, which won a majority of the union election votes last month, with 2,713 votes (61.91 percent), translated into 22 delegates in the company committee, reacted by bemoaning that it will be hard for them to impose the job losses on workers. It stated: "This is a more than considerable volume of jobs [losses], which makes it difficult to reach an agreement that guarantees 100% voluntary leave through retirement support plans and incentivized leave. We can say that a more than complicated negotiation is starting today."

It added, "What [the company] is not going to be able to claim is that, since the surplus is extensive, it will make the conditions of the previous [redundancy] plans cheaper. In any case, what would proceed is the opposite, in order to seek the greatest number of

volunteers.”

UGT has now called management to lower the age for voluntary redundancies under the previous job cuts agreed at 55 years. This layer now represents only 600 workers in the plant, after the UGT signed off on mass redundancy schemes over the past years, the last one affecting 630 workers in April 2021.

Last week, UGT cynically stated that “far from what the company intends, and although it may seem crazy, what we will request from UGT at the negotiating table is that the exit age for a hypothetical plan be lowered below the 55 years agreed in the previous plan.”

The UGT recalled the clause in the Electrification Agreement they signed last year allowing management to “reach an agreement to undertake the voluntary exits.” The whole deal has been exposed as fraud, sold as a way of preserving jobs at the expense of workers at the Saarlouis plant in Germany.

The Electrification Agreement represents the most savage attack on workers in the Valencia plant’s 46-year history, designed to ensure it “won” a fratricidal bidding contest against Saarlouis. It imposes a four-year wage freeze, which under conditions of soaring prices due to NATO’s war against Russia in the Ukraine, represents thousands of euros less for each worker.

Aware of mounting anger, the UGT refused to submit the agreement to a referendum, even when it represented 97 percent of the unionised workers before February’s elections. Instead, they opted to submit the deal to a sham vote in February 2022, while preempting opposition to it by posting a video on YouTube featuring an attack on the WSWs for opposing its reactionary collaboration with Ford management. Without the text available, workers were forced to vote via a union app. It was thus impossible to independently count the vote.

The UGT has once again been exposed as a tool of Ford to ram through attacks. Last August, the UGT downplayed Ford Spain’s refusal to accept millions of euros in corporate bailouts from the Spanish government and the EU which signalled its intention to increase attacks on workers, reneging on its earlier commitments. UGT cynically claimed that investments “are not in question” and will preserve “thousands of jobs in very good conditions.”

The STM-Intersindical Valenciana also stands

exposed. The union claimed to oppose the UGT backroom deals with Ford management, the Electrification Agreement and its sham vote. On this basis, it received a substantial increase in its votes during last February’s elections, gaining 30 percent of the votes and increasing its union affiliation by 28 times, according to STM spokesperson in the plant, Daniel Portillo. Portillo also claimed that the UGT suffered a 40 percent disaffiliation.

It shows that workers are seeking an alternative to oppose wage cuts and job losses, but the STM is no alternative.

Celebrating the results, Portillo promised “we are going to do everything possible as a union to fight and prevent all those cuts that the company can achieve with its majority union (UGT).”

Weeks later, the same Portillo reacted to Ford’s jobs cuts announcement by stating “We hope that within 30 days an agreement can be reached that is so beneficial so that people can present themselves voluntarily [for the redundancy scheme].”

The union then posted a 114-word statement, stating that it “will work and fight to reduce the number of those affected, in order to improve the production lines’ work rhythms and speeds to avoid harm to our health. Of course, we will also fight to avoid traumatic dismissals.”

The devastating expose of the unions shows that to secure their jobs and a decent standard of living, workers at Ford and throughout the auto industry in Spain and across Europe need to create rank-and-file committees. The WSWs urges workers in Valencia to contact the rank-and-file committee in Saarlouis and build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to organise the fightback against Ford and connect workers in a growing number of industries. These committees, democratically controlled by workers, are the only way forward to organize a fight against job cuts.



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