

Ford Valencia and Spain's UGT bureaucracy launch another round of jobs cuts

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Ford Spain has announced a new Redundancy Scheme (ERE) at its Almussafes plant in Valencia to cut 1,622 jobs, a third of the workforce.

In five years, Ford has collaborated with the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT) to carry out four redundancy schemes at Almussafes. It has cut over 5,000 jobs, from 8,300 to approximately 3,200, if the latest cuts are implemented.

These are the consequences of the bidding war initiated by Ford management in 2021 between the Almussafes plant and the Saarlouis plant in Germany to determine which would produce new electric cars and continue operations beyond 2025. The IG Metall and UGT bureaucracies both pressed workers to accept cuts to jobs, wages and working conditions, supposedly to “save jobs.”

From the beginning, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Ford Action Committee of rank-and-file workers in Saarlouis explained that the bureaucracies intended for this fratricidal competition to end in plant closures and mass job losses. German and Spanish union officials pitted Saarlouis and Almussafes workers against each other. The WSWS noted in December 2021: “The concessions extorted in this way are then supposedly intended to ‘secure the site.’ But so far, such concessions have only paved the road to plant closures.”

The UGT bureaucracy responded to the WSWS’ call to fight back independently from the union bureaucracy with a video on January 24, 2022. It stated: “During this last season you will have heard a lot of news about the situation and future of our factory, opinions and doubts about our ability to negotiate good agreements, and also criticism, and some out of touch with reality [in reference to the WSWS].”

The greatest promoters of fake news were in fact the UGT and IG Metall, which promised to preserve jobs, but worked with management to close plants, whilst enforcing salary cuts and precarious contracts.

In February, the final closure of the Saarlouis plant was confirmed, leaving only 1,000 workers of the original 7,000 by the end of 2025. Additionally, 1,500 jobs in supporting industries will be lost. Last week, Ford Germany announced a new cut; several thousand jobs are at stake, primarily in the administration, marketing, sales, services and development center located in Cologne-Merkenich.

Having worked closely with IG Metall to cut jobs, Ford, which earned \$10.4 billion in 2023, is now proceeding with mass layoffs in the Almussafes plant in Valencia, despite it “winning” the bidding competition. The plant’s very future is uncertain.

The company also reneged on its promise to develop an electric vehicle by 2027. Ford now says that only a hybrid model will be developed from that year onwards. Upon hearing this news, just a month ago, UGT stated that “despite the challenges we still have to overcome, and considering the uncertainty we’ve faced in recent months, which became truly worrying, today we can say we bring very good news.” This “good news” translated into the announcement of 1,622 layoffs.

Ford’s sub-contractors, however, have raised the alarm that even this contract may not happen. Several of them have pointed out that by now, Ford should have sent them Requests for Quotation (RFQ) for the production of parts and machinery needed for the new hybrid vehicle.

One supplier told *Economia Digital*, “If anything were to happen, we should know, and there’s nothing.” Another said: “People are scared. ... All we know is that we’re in for a tough time.”

Ford’s latest redundancy scheme again exposes the UGT’s fraudulent promise that working with management to cut salaries would preserve jobs. UGT is now accepting job losses without even a token protest or a strike. In a June 15 meeting, their only proposal was to carry out job cuts with the same conditions as the

previous ones, via early retirement and voluntary redundancies.

UGT claims that improving severance pay or obtaining early retirement will solve workers' problems are lies. What is being proposed is a devastating assault on the industrial and social fabric of Valencia province.

But UGT Ford spokesman Carlos Faubel is proposing "social peace." Last week he said that from now on, the UGT has "a different scenario, in negotiations and in the possibilities of solving this in a positive way for everyone." He added, "we are convinced the company will have no problem in showing its availability and the role it plays, so all this comes to fruition and we maintain social peace, and the vehicle planned for 2027 is a success."

Ford responded in a predictable fashion. In this charade, which workers in Ford and other industries have seen over and over again, management said it had replied to UGT's request to re-hire 1,000 of those laid off, in 2027, when the production of the new vehicle might begin. Workers cannot trust Ford, which has reneged on all its promises.

Ford's redundancy plan reveals critical lessons to be assimilated by workers in Ford Valencia and elsewhere.

First, the entire union apparatus, both in Spain and Germany, tried to divide workers along national lines, suppress the class struggle and imposing management's diktat. Ford Valencia and UGT acted in Almussafes just as IG Metall and Ford Germany acted in Saarlouis. They facilitated layoffs by deceiving workers to block strikes and keep production running until the plant closure, which has happened in Saarlouis and increasingly threatens in Almussafes.

There is no nationalist perspective to win such struggles. Automakers, operating on every continent of the globe, take decisions on a global scale, depending on sales, access to raw materials, shifts in regulatory costs, and public subsidies. Meanwhile the unions tie workers to a national framework, then pit workers in one country against another to offer the most "competitive" conditions for the automakers.

Mass struggles have erupted across the auto industry in Europe and North America over the past two years, but the unions worked together to keep contract struggles divided along national lines, undermining workers' power.

Second, the Spanish bourgeoisie relies on pseudo-left parties like Sumar to subordinate workers to a nationalist, pro-war perspective.

Deputy Prime Minister and Labor Minister Yolanda

Díaz, who recently resigned as Sumar's leader after its debacle in the European elections, issued a brief statement: "We are witnessing today an ERE [Redundancy Plan] at Ford, affecting over a thousand workers, by a company that has significant profits." However, she quickly washed her hands of the situation, cynically claiming this "is not within the competency of the Ministry of Labor."

Díaz bears direct political responsibility for what is happening. In 2020, she was appointed Labor Minister. Her flagship measure was a labor reform continuing the most reactionary elements of the one approved in 2012 by the right-wing Popular Party. This reform allows companies like Ford to impose layoffs through EREs without incurring losses or requiring authorization from the Labor Ministry.

Spain's PSOE-Sumar government has also aggressively lobbied to join the US-led trade war against Chinese exports of electrical vehicles (EVs). These tariffs could go as high as 48 percent. It exposes Sumar's support for the US-EU policy aiming to strangle and subjugate China, if necessary through war.

Workers at Ford Almussafes cannot tie their future to pseudo-lefts like Díaz or the UGT bureaucracy. Time is running out to prevent the closure of the Almussafes plant, as happened in Saarlouis.

To prevent this, workers must organize across national borders, independently and against their works councils, forming rank-and-file committees democratically controlled by the workers themselves. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers in Valencia to oppose the UGT's treachery and build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to organize the fightback against Ford.



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