

Ford faces outrage in France over factory closure

October 15 2018



"Stop job cuts" read the T-shirts of trade unionists greeting French Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire at a meeting Monday with Ford management over the fate of the Blanquefort factory outside Bordeaux in southwestern France. Some 850 jobs are at risk

US carmaker Ford came under fire from the French government on

Monday over its plans to close a factory producing gear boxes in southwest France that employs 850 people.

After a stormy meeting between management and French officials, Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire sounded furious at the US group's desire to shut the plant near Bordeaux, rather than sell it to a French buyer.

"If they think they can just shut up shop and that the state and local authorities won't react, then they're making a mistake," Le Maire told reporters. "We're going to fight and we won't be taken advantage of."

"Ford's position cannot be defended and what can't be defended needs to be combatted," he added.

Ford announced in February that it would stop investing in its Blanquefort plant, which has produced [gear boxes](#) since 1972, and the issue has been raised by the French and US governments.

The site has become another battleground between French trade unions and American multinationals that are often portrayed in France as heartless job-slashing capitalists.

Plans by US appliance maker Whirlpool to close a factory in the northern town of Amiens became a controversy during last year's presidential election campaign, which was won by centrist Emmanuel Macron.

One of Macron's far-left rivals, Philippe Poutou, is a mechanic at Ford's Blanquefort plant who became a minor celebrity during the election with his angry denunciations of multinationals and a pledge to outlaw redundancies.

Other past factory closures by American companies such as Goodyear and Caterpillar, part of a wider trend of industrial decline in France, have also led to bitterness and public campaigns.

Bordeaux's mayor, former prime minister Alain Juppe, walked out of the meeting with Ford's management on Monday before the end—and angrily denounced the company afterwards as "leading us on".

Juppe and Le Maire's anger has focused on Ford's reluctance to favour an offer for the site from Punch Powerglide, a manufacturer based in the eastern French city of Strasbourg, which would come with pledges of more state aid.

"I spoke to the chairman of Ford last Friday by phone and the chairman told me that between a purchase of the site by Punch and the closure of the site, Ford preferred closing the factory," Le Maire said.

"I completely disagree with this choice," he added.

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