

Britain: Vauxhall worker condemns restructuring agreement

Our Correspondent
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Paul, a production operator at Vauxhall's Luton plant, spoke to the World Socialist Web Site about the consequences of the unions' decision to abandon any fight against job losses.

There is no campaign against the job losses now. I've just come out of a meeting inside the plant where the union and the management want as many people as possible to go to IBC. But if you go to IBC it's not the same contract—it's worse pay and conditions. To make people transfer, they are offering a £7,000 incentive, but that means losing your Vauxhall contract, which is better than the IBC contract.

Because so many people like me haven't handed in their option forms—to go to IBC, to Ellesmere Port, or to leave Vauxhall under “separation” [redundancy] or special early retirement—they are now talking about withdrawing the offer on separation. I asked [union official] Trevor Allman what he thought about them threatening to withdraw it. He said it was a possibility and that it could mean separation terms being set at just the government minimum. I don't believe they intend to do it. I think they are just trying to get people to fill the forms in.

There are 800 forms in from people who want to go to IBC but that's not legally binding. Only when you sign a contract with IBC are you an employee. They are taking 40 or 50 people a day over to the Frontera and van line and training them and after a period of time they will be offered a contract.

Our wages in Vauxhall are £16,500 basic for a production operator. IBC's basic is better—it's £17,200 but you don't get a production bonus (£1,300) or a productivity bonus, which is a share of 5 percent of Vauxhall profits. So the £7,000 incentive pay out is to cover the loss of production bonus and profit share out. It is also meant to cover the seven years work that we

were promised by Vauxhall for the Epsilon model that we're not receiving.

The fact they've just taken this away shows that the agreements made with the unions are not worth the paper they are written on. Management can turn around for whatever reason and change it. Now they say this has happened because the J sector [saloon models] in Europe has declined. Vauxhall was a profitable company, independent of Opel [GM's subsidiary in Germany] which is not profitable. Because the market in Europe, especially in Germany, is collapsing they're cutting jobs. It is easier and cheaper to sack workers in England than on the continent, where contracts are legally binding in law. Here contracts are just not worth the paper they are written on.

The company also keeps changing the goal posts on the closing date for the option forms. Before Christmas it was supposed to January 29 but the union told people not to fill in the forms because they were still trying to save the plant. Now, for some reason, the unions have done a complete U-turn. There will be no more industrial action and they're trying to get people to go to IBC. Yet out of 3,000 forms handed in, only 800 have said they want to transfer to IBC. Some 350 people have not signed their forms yet. Vauxhall are looking for 1, 214 to go to IBC, which means they are still 414 short. And not all those 800 will necessarily get a contract at IBC.

See Also:

Britain: Car unions agree to Vauxhall's restructuring programme

[22 March 2001]

LINK TO ACCOMPANYING ARTICLE

Auto workers vote for strike action at Britain's GM-Vauxhall plants

[22 February 2001]

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/feb2001/vaux-f22.shtml>



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