

Europe: Nokia unions side with management

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5 February 2008

Last week in Brussels, a meeting of Nokia's European Works Council, attended by representatives of the unions and management, discussed the announced closure of the company's factory in Bochum, Germany. The outcome was pitiful: the Finnish trade unions signalled their acceptance for management's decision to close the Bochum plant and thereby effectively sabotaged the strategy of the German Works Council to extract some concessions from the Nokia executive committee.

The meeting in Brussels provided a prime example of the role played by the trade unions in defending "their" national production locations as they increasingly adopt the function of co-managers and stab workers in the back. Once again it demonstrates that working people can only defend their interests to the extent they reject any reliance on the trade unions and works councils, and take the struggle into their own hands and directly link up with workers in all other locations.

On January 15, Nokia management announced that it intended to close the Bochum plant this summer and would shift the production of mobile phones to Romania, where it is developing a new factory. This means the loss of some 4,300 jobs in Bochum—2,300 Nokia staff, 1,000 temporary workers and about 1,000 jobs in ancillary industries.

Just a few days later, the company announced record profits for 2007, worth €7.2 billion. This represents a 67 percent increase in profits over the previous year, making it the most successful in the company's history.

The Bochum factory had also contributed to Nokia's record profits. The magazine *Capital* reported that Bochum had made a €134 million operating profit, corresponding to a profit of €90,000 per production worker. Moreover, the company received additional interest on profits amounting to €70 million.

The announcement of the closure of this profitable factory immediately unleashed a wave of protest among

workers. Not only those at Nokia, but also workers from the Opel Bochum auto plant and other workers from around the region demanded the Nokia factory remain in the city and that a struggle be organised to defend jobs.

However, from the outset, the Nokia Bochum works council has done everything to prevent strikes and other measures, isolating the workforce and preventing an effective struggle against the company's closure plans.

While the workforce spontaneously took strike action and organized a demonstration as soon as they heard about the closure plans on the radio, the works council and the IG Metall union immediately strangled this initiative, warning against "ill-considered actions." On January 17, the works council and the union stood idly by as Nokia security staff prevented some 1,000 temporary workers previously employed in the plant from entering the factory.

On January 22, a 16,000-strong demonstration took place in Bochum against the closure of the Nokia factory. This protest was exploited by the works council to spread nationalist and chauvinist slogans (such as, "Germans work better than Romanians"). Anyone who had expected to hear the union proposing how to defend the threatened jobs would have been bitterly disappointed. All that could be heard were appeals to the German government to exert pressure on Nokia and Finland. Not one proposal for a real struggle has been announced or even suggested.

Although union representatives publicly call the closure a "scandal," their main complaint is that they were ignored when it came to management making important decisions. Thus works council chair Gisela Achenbach accuses management of having "deceived" her at a meeting about the future of the factory in November 2007.

The German trade unions expected two things from the meeting of Nokia's European works council

company in Brussels: on the one hand, they should arrange a few symbolic protest actions, which could then be passed off as “international solidarity” to the Bochum workers, in order to keep their mounting anger in check. Secondly, they wanted the backing of the European works council in order to strengthen their own negotiating position vis-à-vis management and to be able to play a more significant role in the winding up of the Bochum plant.

But their European colleagues are just as enthusiastic co-managers as the German works council representatives—and upset their plans. The chairman of Nokia’s European works council, Mika Paukkeri, and representatives of the company’s Finnish plants do not really object to the management’s decision and, according to one press report, do not have a problem with the closure of the Bochum factory.

Sture Fjaeder, chief negotiator of the Finnish trade union AKAVA, told the press that the globalization of production meant the unions were left with little room for manoeuvre when it comes to important management decisions: “For reasons of cost, it is impossible to reverse the closure decision.... Simultaneously, politicians and trade unions must respect the fact that global enterprises have to take such unpleasant decisions and it is not possible to turn back the clock.”

In the final analysis, the 20 works council representatives from eight European production locations could only agree on a non-committal statement, which reads in part, “Nokia is no longer a social enterprise.” Those meeting in Brussels also concurred that “they did not agree with the way the announcement to close the Bochum plant was made” and they “demanded constructive discussions with Nokia management as quickly as possible.”

The Bochum works council has done everything it could to appease the company and has supported every attack on the workforce. In recent years bonus payments have been cut, wages have been lowered through introducing annualised hours, and the massive use of temporary labourers increased. The latter were deployed like full-time staff, but only received wages of 110 or even 60 working hours a month (corresponding to a gross wage of €811 or €442 a month).

As one press article reported, the works council calculated that with an investment of €14.3 million the

capacity of the Bochum plant could be doubled without requiring more staff. Thus, according to IG Metall representatives, productivity could equal the new plant in Romania.

The Bochum works council does not want to oppose management, they just want to have more involvement in winding up the factory. Like their counterparts in other European works councils, they are committed to defending “national” production and display the same cold arrogance towards workers in other countries as the representatives of the Finnish unions have towards workers in Bochum.

In order to defend their jobs workers have to oppose the trade unions and the works councils. They must resist being divided along national lines—an effective struggle against a globally active enterprise can only be conducted internationally. Workers in Bochum must make contact with Nokia staff in all the company’s other locations internationally and organise a joint struggle to defend jobs and social conditions.

The *World Socialist Web Site* energetically supports such a common struggle. Contact the WSWS—we will translate your reports from the different factories and publish your proposals for joint action against the company. A European and worldwide strike to defend all jobs, for decent wages and to improve working conditions requires above all a political break with the union policy of “social partnership” and a struggle conducted on the basis of an international socialist strategy.



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