

A socialist program to defend jobs at Opel

For a rebellion against the nationalist policies of the trade unions

Socialist Equality Party
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The decision by the management of General Motors to close its Opel factory in Antwerp represents a new stage in the dispute over the future of Opel-GM in Europe. The consequences of the nationalist and divisive policies of the trade unions, based on playing-off factories in one country against company plants situated abroad, are evident for all those who have followed the struggle for jobs at GM-Europe in the past few months and years—massive job and wages cuts together with the shutdown of entire plants.

The closure of the plant at Antwerp makes two things abundantly clear:

First, the closure is the prelude for an all-out attack on all GM Opel employees throughout Europe. The company's announcement of a total of 8,300 dismissals in the next period throughout its European operations is only the beginning—additional plant closures will follow. At the same time, the job cuts are being used to blackmail those workers retaining their jobs to accept further cuts to their benefits and wages.

Second, the shutdown of the Antwerp factory was a keystone of the Magna strategy, which was taken over by GM after its executive decided to reject the Magna bid and retain control of its European operations. The Magna strategy had been drawn up by Germany's biggest trade union, IG Metall (IGM), and German works councils in close cooperation with the so-called European Employee Forum (EEF). The IGM works councils have systematically worked towards the closure of the Belgian plant in order to "rescue" production at the Bochum factory in Germany.

The current declarations of regret on the part of the German trade unions for the fate of the workers in Antwerp are utterly cynical and hypocritical, and cannot hide the fact that the original plans for the

closure of the Belgium plant were an integral element of the Magna concept worked out in the office of IG Metall leader Klaus Franz.

There is a simple but vital conclusion to be drawn from these events: the defence of jobs and the prevention of plant closures can no longer be left in the hands of the works councils and trade unions. Any resistance is doomed to failure so long as this corrupt bureaucracy maintains its grip over employees. Workers must look upon and treat union officials and the works councils for what they really are—highly paid accomplices and lackeys of management. Resistance to plant closures must be organized independently of the trade unions and in cooperation with the workforces of other plants across Europe.

Many workers are rightly furious. They feel they have been thoroughly betrayed and left to their own devices. The Belgian trade unions and their functionaries have proved to be just as duplicitous as their German counterparts. They have also participated in the EEF for a long time and are thoroughly acquainted with the corrupt practices of Klaus Franz. They knew that Franz's agreement to the shutdown of the Belgian works in the context of the Magna plan was bound up with a plan for a 10 percent participation in the company by the works councils. But not one of these bureaucrats was prepared to go public on these plans and mobilize auto workers. Up until this day, Rudi Kennes functions as head of the trade union in Antwerp and deputy chairman of the European works council forum working closely together with the council's chairman, Klaus Franz.

The urgency of an international socialist perspective

Despite the understandable rage and indignation of

many workers over the announced shutdown of the factory and the sell-out organized by the trade unions, it is necessary to keep a cool head and prepare for a struggle that raises important issues of political perspectives. The right-wing policy of the trade unions results directly from their unconditional subordination to the capitalist profit system. This is why they argue that there is no alternative to cuts in jobs, wages and benefits.

It is necessary to see the crisis in the automobile industry in connection with the international financial and economic crisis. The planned plant closures and mass redundancies at Opel and many other companies are part of a series of major social attacks undertaken by the ruling elite aimed at shifting the entire burden of the international crisis onto the population. In Germany, Belgium and every other country, governments have provided hundreds of billions of euro for the so-called rescue of the banks. They have looted state treasuries and turned taxpayers' money over to the big companies and financial concerns in order to secure their profits and speculative wealth. Now the same governments are implementing drastic savings measures at the expense of the broad masses.

The crisis in the auto industry and manufacturing as a whole can only be resolved in a progressive manner by a transformation of social conditions. The power of the banks, which unleashed the economic crisis and are now profiting from it, must be broken by transforming them into public utilities under democratic control.

The auto companies must also be nationalised and run democratically by the workers in the industry. Major businesses and industries must be run in accordance with social needs rather than to guarantee the private accumulation of profits.

An effective struggle against the planned plant closures and for the defence of all jobs at all locations is only possible on the basis of such a socialist perspective.

In order to break the influence of the trade union bureaucracy and its nationalist policies it is necessary to build independent factory committees. They must establish contact with all European GM factories, GM workers in the US and industrial workers all over the globe. The struggle against globally operating companies requires an international strategy.

Combat measures for the defence of production

facilities—including strikes, factory occupations and mass demonstrations—must be made the starting point for a broad political mobilization against the companies and government.

The Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) is the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and campaigns for such a international socialist program in close cooperation with our fraternal organizations, the Socialist Equality parties in Great Britain, the US and across the globe. Together we publish the *World Socialist Web Site*, a daily online news journal.

We offer you our political support in the fight against factory closures and for the defence of all jobs and call upon those who read this leaflet and agree with our perspective to contact the PSG and the editorial board of the *WSWS*.



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