

Statement by the Socialist Equality Party of Germany (PSG) and the editorial board of the World Socialist Web Site

Opel workers: Vote no on the contract!

15 March 2013

The Socialist Equality Party of Germany (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit) and the editorial board of the World Socialist Web Site call on all Opel workers, and especially members of the IG Metall union, to decisively reject the “Master Agreement”.

The agreement reached between GM-Opel management, IG Metall and the joint works council entitled “Master Agreement—Drive 2022” is aimed at pitting workers at different plants against each other and enforcing the closure of the Bochum factory.

The commitment to retain production in the company’s plants in Rüsselsheim, Eisenach and Kaiserslautern is vague and imprecise. The proposed contract foresees “an allocation of at least two new models” for Rüsselsheim and Eisenach in the period after 2015. Planned for Kaiserslautern is “a component strategy” as part of “a growth plan”.

The only definite items in the contract are related to two issues: the closure of the Bochum plant and massive cuts in workers’ income.

With regard to Bochum, the agreement states: “According to the [GM Opel] Group’s current planning, it is unlikely from the end of 2016 that there will be a successor product to replace current vehicle production”. The “unlikely from the end of 2016” includes the renewed threat that production will be halted in Bochum as early as 2014.

In order to create the impression that the Bochum operation will remain open after vehicle production stops at the end of 2016, the contract refers to a “conversion process”. This conversion will not be organized or financed by Opel. Instead the agreement states that the state administration and local authority will draw up a so-called “Bochum Perspective 2022” no later than March 31, 2013.

Meanwhile the job cuts at Bochum are to start immediately. The third shift at the plant is due to be eliminated in early April—in just two weeks—resulting in the loss of 700 jobs. Should there be insufficient numbers of workers prepared to leave “voluntarily”, they will be made redundant at the end of next year. A further 2,000 workers will then lose their jobs by 2016. Wage increases will be suspended or postponed. Payments made outside of the regular contract are to be abolished.

The aim of the Master Agreement is to enforce the closure of Opel’s Bochum plant. Therefore it must be rejected!

Opel executives and their co-managers—IG Metall union officials—are seeking to set a precedent with the Bochum closure. A workforce renowned for its militancy is to be brought to its knees. The planned closure will initiate a series of new attacks on auto workers that go far beyond those spelled out currently in the Master Agreement and by Opel management.

It is a question of principle for GM Opel! The costs of the international financial and economic crisis are to be passed on to the working class.

IG Metall and its works council argue that job losses, plant closures and wage cuts are unavoidable given the current crisis in the auto industry and the level of international competitiveness. This argument is false and must be rejected.

The problem is not a structural crisis of the auto industry, but rather the result of a general attack on all workers. Five years ago the German government made hundreds of billions of euros available to the banks in order to save them from the consequences of their own criminal speculation. Now that money is to be recouped at the expense of working people. Starting with Greece,

a systematic offensive is being undertaken to dismantle all the social gains won in Europe by the workers' movement in the course of the past 65 years.

Poverty is growing rapidly as the wealth of the rich and stock market prices reach record levels. The crisis in the auto industry is a direct result of the fact that many people can no longer afford to purchase a car. The crisis is being used to force Opel workers to their knees and commence a wave of layoffs and plant closings. Opel management has the full support of employers' associations and the government.

Opel workers must stand up and fight back. This means defying the logic of the capitalist system and the extortion involved in competing for markets by defending the right to work and fair pay as basic, inalienable rights.

The issue is not what is or is not possible within the framework of the profit system. When company executives and their co-managers in the union and works council declare that maintaining jobs and wages is impossible under the current conditions then they are conceding that capitalism is incompatible with the elementary needs and interests of the population.

Jobs can only be defended on the basis of a political perspective that begins with the needs of the population rather than the profit demands of big business and the banks, that is, on the basis of a socialist perspective. The nature of the modern auto industry makes clear that such a struggle requires an international strategy.

It is necessary to oppose the Mafia methods of the IG Metall. This bureaucratic apparatus thinks it is omnipotent because its leaders are welcomed in the offices and boardrooms of the German government and big companies where they are handsomely remunerated for their services. It was no less than the head of IG Metall, Berthold Huber, who personally recruited former Volkswagen executive Karl-Thomas Neumann to take over at Opel. And it was the union that worked out the Master Agreement now to be rammed through.

Unions around the world are playing the same role. In the US, the United Auto Workers has supported Barack Obama's restructuring of the auto industry involving tens of thousands of layoffs and the halving of entry-level wages. In return the UAW was rewarded with a financial stake in the auto companies.

For all these reasons: Vote no!

Make contact with the WSWS to establish an action

committee and prepare a common international struggle to defend jobs and wages.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact