

# Germany: GM-Opel workers fear Bochum plant will close in 2014

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Opel workers in Bochum fear that General Motors intends to close the plant sooner than previously announced. A rumour is circulating that the permanent night shift will be withdrawn as early as March 2014.

According to workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*, this could be the beginning of a quick end to the factory. “One to two months later, the rotating shift system will be converted to a single-shift operation”, one said. “Then things could already be at an end in the summer.”

Since Opel workers currently produce more cars than are sold, concerns about a plant closure long before the end of next year, maybe even at the beginning next summer, are well founded.

No one knows who is spreading the rumours about early closure. On his web site, the Bochum works council chair Rainer Eienkel states that the culprit is “clearly the management, who wanted to withdraw the night shift in Bochum as early as June 2013”.

Eienkel asks the staff to make this a topic of discussion at the staff meeting next Monday: “It is important that colleagues ask management to answer questions and not unsettle the workforce through constant rumours.” The Bochum management is obliged to “inform staff about their plans”, he adds.

It may be that management is deliberately trying to intimidate workers with constant rumours of an early closure. But more essentially, both the IG Metall trade union, the Opel general works council and the Bochum works council all support this campaign of intimidation.

While IG Metall has helped develop the plans for the closure of the Bochum plant with Opel management and GM headquarters, the Bochum works council under Rainer Eienkel is sabotaging and suppressing any resistance. In March, when Bochum workers rejected the so-called Master Contract because it included mass layoffs, wage cuts and the end of production in 2016, they

were derided by IG Metall, isolated by Eienkel, and kept quiet.

Those who advocated strikes and demonstrations in defence of the plant were accused of activism and “madness” by the works council leader. Instead, Eienkel sought to pacify the workforce with talk of negotiations with the factory and the group management.

A recent statement on Eienkel’s web site now admits that negotiations have yet to take place. “The Bochum works council has used all opportunities for negotiations to find inventive and reliable solutions for Bochum workers, the Bochum plant and the Opel brand”, writes Eienkel obsequiously, only then to declare, “This has been denied so far.” Eienkel’s conclusion? “Nevertheless, we want to hold on to them [the negotiations]”.

What a declaration of bankruptcy! For months, the works council chair has lectured the 3,300 employees—who are concerned for their jobs and the well-being of their families—that they should trust to his negotiating skills. Then he admits that the company has not been negotiating. In reality, GM-Opel just keeps presenting ultimatums on the closure of the plant. And Eienkel has nothing better to do than to further abase himself.

This policy only encourages Opel and GM to proceed even more ferociously against the Bochum workers. When the workers rejected the “Master Contract” in March, Opel CEO Karl-Thomas Neumann announced that the factory would now be closed at the end of 2014. Production of the Zafira model, originally planned to continue at Bochum until 2016, would be transferred to the parent plant at Rüsselsheim. Meanwhile, it became known that IG Metall and the Opel general works council chair, Wolfgang Schäfer-Klug, had long since agreed on this relocation.

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One of the diversions used by Eienkel to sabotage the defence of jobs is to go through the courts. Before the holidays at the end of July, the Bochum works council filed a lawsuit with the Darmstadt Regional Court against the April 17 decision of the Opel Supervisory Board to shift production of the Zafira to Rüsselsheim. Eienkel justified the suit with the argument that the “entire supervisory board was not properly informed”. The court will only hear the case on December 5.

Opel management is very relaxed about the legal proceedings. The supervisory board had “made its decision in accordance with all applicable rules,” a company spokesman in Rüsselsheim told the press.

Moreover, according to legal experts, were the judge to complain about something, the decision of the supervisory board could be repeated. The relocation is officially only rejected by Eienkel. Even if he stands firm on it, the IG Metall representatives on the Supervisory Board as well as the works council chairs of all other the other plants support the decision.

On the instructions of IG Metall, Eienkel has withdrawn a lawsuit against the announced early closure of the transmission plant (Plant II) this month, rather than at the end of the year. He now wants to focus on “negotiations”. Approximately 270 employees work in Plant II, building gearboxes for the Corsa and Meriva models. Opel justified the early closure, saying that a sufficient number of transmissions had already been produced to supply European Opel factories to the end of the year, and that sales had declined.

Despite all the verbal confrontations, the trade unions, the general works council, and the Bochum works council are partners with complementary roles in a conspiracy against the workforce. When Opel and GM management attack the workforce in the interest of corporate profits, they know that they can rely on the unions and the works council.



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