

SEP (Germany) campaign reaches GM-Opel workers

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A Socialist Equality Party (PSG) election campaign team last week distributed the latest issue of the *World Socialist Web Site's* Auto Workers Newsletter at the gates of GM-Opel's plant in Rüsselsheim in west central Germany. The campaigners' discussions with workers were dominated by the treachery of the trade unions and the works council.

A statement from the SEP to General Motors Holden workers in Australia for a joint struggle in defense of jobs met with great interest. The trade unions in Australia are playing the same despicable role as in Germany, where the IG Metall union has supported the closure of Opel's plant in Bochum and sabotaged any struggle by the workers against it.

In Australia, 1,700 workers at Holden plants in Adelaide and Melbourne have been given an ultimatum: either "voluntarily" give up hard won rights and social benefits or face the shutdown of the plant. This was backed up with reminders to Australian workers of the imminent shutdown of the Opel plant in Bochum, which was announced after German workers rejected similar blackmail demands.

Many employees at GM-Opel's Rüsselsheim plant took the newsletter with interest and began to read it right away. "It is just like it is here with us," a younger worker said at the main gate. "The chairman of the works council appears together with management, as if they were heart and soul. I am not in the IG Metall, because I think they don't represent my interests."

A production worker said, "I can understand well what these workers are going through. For us here it is also getting worse." The worker and several colleagues reported that an increasing number of workers are employed on the production line by outside firms and earn less for doing the same work.

A young woman explained she worked for an outside

contractor in the canteen and said she would be laid off by the end of the year. "They have terminated the contracts of our whole operation from the end of the year," she said.

Roland, a recent retiree, interjected that it was the same everywhere. "Temporary job agencies are on the offensive. I know that from the airport; things are getting worse there." The workforce in each operational area was getting smaller and workers had to do more work in the same time, he added. "It is not work any more. I have 36 years under my belt. On September 1, I became a pensioner and I am delighted I can stay at home."

New workers from the agencies had to "do the same thing, but for only half the pay," Roland added. "It is no different at Opel," the worker who previously worked at Opel said.

Other workers who took the leaflet during a shift change at the gate responded with interest to the PSG's call for a struggle independent of IG Metall. Workers are well aware of the close collaboration between the trade union leaders and the company. On September 11, the chair of the central works council, Wolfgang Schäfer-Klug, praised Opel management in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ).

"Together with IG Metall chief Berthold Huber, we at the works council have always expressed the opinion in negotiations that Opel can only be successful again when it gets a highly qualified top management," he told FAZ. "We have that management now," Schäfer-Klug crowed. "The quality of management dramatically changed," he said, "and absolutely for the better."

"The competence and performance" of new CEO Karl Thomas Neumann, who previously led

Volkswagen in China, was “undeniable,” he added.

Schäfer-Klug had special praise for Steve Girsky, who as chief of General Motors’ European operations was personally responsible for the massive cuts at Opel and the shutdown of the Bochum plant. Girsky had “made the change at Opel possible,” he said. It was “a bit of an irony in Opel’s history that of all people it was an American from General Motors who was able to build an open and honest dialogue with IG Metall and the works council, and to reach decisions in management which practically saved Opel for a second time.”

Schäfer-Klug did not mention a single word about the fate of the workers in Bochum. Instead he praised the relocation of the production of the Zafira model, which is currently built in Bochum, to the parent plant as a guarantee for the future of the Rüsselsheim facility. “The parent plant has two advantages. We are the most modern plant in Europe. You will not find another European factory which produces so flexibly as Rüsselsheim.”

In collaboration with management, IG Metall is pitting workers at each location against the others in order to make production as cheap and flexible as possible. When they occasionally speak of “international solidarity,” this is only to provide a cover for their nationalist and pro-capitalist politics.

When the GM-Opel plant in Antwerp was due to be closed in the autumn of 2009, the head of the works council in Frankfurt, Armin Schild, boasted that IG Metall had “no need to be lectured to about international solidarity.” A few weeks later, the plant was closed.



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