

German IG Metall union refuses to present agreement to GM-Opel workers

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The contract concluded between German trade unions and GM-Opel management in mid-November is yet to be finally confirmed. IG Metall, the works council and GM-Opel merely agreed on a few key points, which the trade union has refused to present to the workforce.

With the agreement of November 17, the closure of the Bochum plant was sealed. The contents published by IG Metall were nearly identical to those that Opel workers rejected by an overwhelming majority in a vote on the “master contract” in March, with the only difference being that the closure would be imposed by the end of 2014 instead of March 2016.

Prior to its release, the works council and Opel management had negotiated for months on a social plan, but clearly not to the satisfaction of Opel and IG Metall. At first, the trade union had held back, following the strong hostility from workers in Bochum to the plan it had worked out to close the Bochum plant. But at the beginning of November, it suddenly took over the leadership of the negotiations. Only one week later, IG Metall and Opel reported that as a result of the talks they had reached a collective social agreement.

In a November 18 statement entitled “Social Contract for Opel Bochum reached,” IG Metall’s district leader for North-Rhein Westphalia, Knut Giesler, who led the talks, commented, “It is bitter for the people that no vehicles will be built in Bochum beyond 2014. This was not going to be prevented by the contract plan.” In its press release from the same day, IG Metall wrote that there were still “essential details on the contract to work out in the coming days.”

At an employees’ meeting on December 9, chairman of the Bochum works council Rainer Eienkel presented some of the key points to some workers via PowerPoint. However, the agreement would not be presented to the Bochum workforce, he said. Eienkel also refused to present the text of the agreement to the works council. As

a justification he claimed that he did not actually have the agreement. IG Metall had it, as they had negotiated it with him and Opel.

IG Metall and the works council are now claiming that there is no binding contract. Both speak of an “agreement on key points.” Eienkel published a statement on his web site on December 19 entitled “Talks on contract continue.” In it he wrote, “Apart from the key points cited by IG Metall, there is no signed agreement so far.” Talks would continue at the beginning of 2014, although those works councillors participating would not yet present a timetable for negotiations.

This game of hide-and-seek suggests that IG Metall, with the agreement of the works council, has already consented to further attacks on the Bochum workforce and are trying to conceal this from the workers for as long as possible.

Court proceedings at the Bochum labour court on December 18 also made this clear. Works councillor Annegret Gärtner-Leymann of the Maoist MLPD (Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany), which leads the Bochum works group “Offensive,” requested the granting by the labour court of temporary access to the published document on the key points.

During the proceedings, it became clear that several works council representatives, including Eienkel, were present at the meeting of the negotiating committee for the collective social agreement and agreed to the key points on November 17. It was also clear that there was in fact a document of key points, which was signed by the IG Metall regional leader Knut Giesler.

At the beginning of the proceedings, presiding judge Dr. Dewander referred to the fact that the application was for the publication of a document of key points for the collective social agreement, but the works council was not a contractual party to the agreement. To the judge’s question as to whether the works council had been

“allowed to inspect the documents” as desired, Eienkel responded that they had not. He stated that he had requested that Knut Giesler make the document accessible, but that Giesler had rejected this.

Questioned by Gärtner-Leymann, Opel’s chief of human resources who was in attendance, Elmar Eising, confirmed that Adam Opel AG had the desired documents. But he also stated, “We won’t do anything without our contractual partner (IG Metall).”

IG Metall’s conspiracy with the Opel concern has seldom been clearer. The whole of the previous year has exposed the double game of IG Metall and the works councils, including those of the MLPD, in imposing the shutdown of the Opel plant by the end of 2014. All participants in this play their own part.

IG Metall worked out the planned cuts and shutdown at Opel in its “Germany Plan,” and it has implemented them in close collaboration with Opel management. Eienkel and the works council have taken on the job of keeping the workforce quiet and putting them off from fighting back.

Eienkel admitted this openly during the court proceedings. “We had only two possibilities: either we agree to the contract or lead a political strike. These were the two options. We decided to accept.”

The phrase “political strike” was chosen deliberately by Eienkel to emphasise an action that is prohibited by law and to create the impression that his hands were tied. For years, it has been Eienkel who has blocked strikes and protests against many thousands of job cuts. Since he took over as works council chair in 2005, 70 percent of jobs have been eliminated.

As the top representative of the works council in the plant, Eienkel was involved in all of the discussions and agreements between the union and Opel management. He knew early on about the planned shutdown, but concealed this from the workforce and spread the story that nothing had yet been decided. Even when the union and management announced the closure of the Bochum plant at the end of last year, it was Eienkel who vehemently attacked those calling for protests and measures to fight back.

The MLPD and its works group also slavishly defend IG Metall, and provide their foot soldiers in the plant. In the court proceedings initiated by the MLPD, they did not focus on the obvious conspiracy between IG Metall and company management.

Gärtner-Leymann and her lawyer, Roland Meister, a member of the Central Committee of the MLPD, did not

press the issue of IG Metall’s refusal to present the agreement or the document containing the key points to the workforce.

Instead, they concentrated on Eienkel. Gärtner-Leymann said, “I cannot imagine that something was agreed to which was not presented in writing.” Meister also repeatedly asked Eienkel for the documents.

Since Eienkel repeatedly denied having possession of the text of the deal, the court rejected the application for temporary access to the material.

The MLPD had already previously begun to focus exclusively on conflicts with Eienkel, whom it had earlier supported. And this was done right at the point when IG Metall took responsibility for enforcing the plant shutdown into its hands. In this way, IG Metall is to be removed from the firing line and workers prevented from drawing the necessary conclusions.

The role of IG Metall is the central issue in the conflicts at Opel in Bochum. Opel workers must organise independently of the union to be able to defend their jobs. As a first step, they should force Giesler to publish all of the points agreed on behind their backs with Opel and declare them null and void. One thing has become clear: IG Metall does not speak on behalf of the workers.

Independent new organisations, such as action committees, must be formed out of the ranks of the workforce and their families to lead a struggle against the destruction of jobs. The German Socialist Equality Party (PSG) and the *World Socialist Web Site* support every initiative aimed at breaking the grip of the trade union, works councils and their supporters over the workers. We call upon all of those who are unwilling to accept the destruction of the essentials of life for thousands of workers and their families without a fight to contact us.



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