

Mass layoffs at Bombardier hit Germany

Dietmar Henning
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In mid-February, Canadian aerospace and train manufacturer Bombardier announced around 7,000 global job cuts in the coming two years, approximately 10 percent of its worldwide workforce. Of these, 3,200 jobs will be eliminated in the train division, which has its headquarters in Berlin.

The specific details of the international layoff plans have been announced over the last week. Several days ago, the 5,500 Bombardier employees in Belfast, Northern Ireland, involved in the production of aircraft wings were informed that 1,080 jobs would be lost. The largest number of lay-offs will take place in Canada, where 2,400 positions are to go in Quebec and an additional 430 in Ontario.

The 1,430 job cuts announced in Germany by Bombardier will chiefly impact its three plants in eastern Germany: Hennigsdorf near Berlin, as well as Görlitz and Bautzen on the Polish and Czech borders.

As many as 700 jobs will be shed in Görlitz, where 2,800 workers are currently employed, and 230 in Bautzen, which has a workforce of 1,200. The approximately 1,000 workers at the two neighboring plants are temporary contract workers who will be affected most of all by the lay-offs.

In Hennigsdorf, 270 jobs will be cut, including 70 contract workers. Currently, 2,850 workers are employed there, making it the company's largest German location.

The remaining 230 job cuts are distributed across Bombardier's five sites in western Germany: Kassel, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Braunschweig and Siegen. According to company spokesman Andreas Dienemann, the company's headquarters in Berlin will not escape layoffs, *Tagespiegel* reported. Around 600 workers are employed there.

When the Hennigsdorf workers were informed about the lay-off plans at a special employees' meeting, around 1,000 workers protested against the job cuts in

front of the factory gates.

While workers have reacted with surprise and anger, the works council and IG Metall trade union are already collaborating with company management to work out the details of the lay-offs. Bombardier's Dienemann said that the job cuts would be implemented by the end of 2017 in line with a so-called social agreement. To this end, talks had been initiated with the works council to negotiate a plan.

Central works council chair Michael Wobst claimed that the timetable for commencing talks on a social plan was "totally unclear." At the same time, he said the works council feared the ending of production at Hennigsdorf and the retention of only development work and a small prototype production facility. An additional several hundred jobs were at risk. "Details about the planned measures have to be presented in full," he demanded.

Wobst's claim that he is not fully informed lacks all credibility. He knows very well about the planned measures. He is, after all, deputy chairman of the supervisory board. On this body, he sits alongside the investor representatives as well as the heads of the works councils from each location: Jürgen Runge (Mannheim), Gerd Kaczmarek (Bautzen), Jürgen Korstian (Siegen) and Erhard Peter (Kassel). For IG Metall, two representatives from the Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony district sit on the supervisory board: district head Olivier Höbel and Anne Karl, trade union secretary for student work, employees and engineering.

IG Metall and the works council's claims of surprise are not genuine, but rather part of a deliberate double-game. The contrived outrage and calls for a few symbolic protests are aimed at concealing the fact that the works councils, IG Metall officials and company management are collaborating intimately to enforce the lay-offs with as little opposition as possible.

At the beginning of a joint meeting of IG Metall and the central works council last Friday, several trade union officials announced plans for major actions. “The planned job cuts are from our point of view a short-term smash-and-grab operation which is definitely not necessary,” said Jan Otto, IG Metall chief for eastern Saxony. “We are not going to accept it lying down.”

After the conference in Schönefeld (Dahme-Spreewald), things sounded very different. “The lack of a concept from management is becoming an existential threat to the sites in the east and west,” IG Metall district leader Höbel stated in the manner of a co-manager.

The works council and IG Metall consider that management failures are to blame for Bombardier Transport’s poor finances. The company was criticised again for outsourcing some production to low-wage locations, where “quality of work [is] lower.” “Over the course of years, we have pointed out the mistakes from our point of view,” said Bautzen’s works council chair Kaczmarek.

Höbel demanded negotiations with the employer’s side after the conference. According to Dienemann, these have already begun.

The works councils and IG Metall have received backing from local SPD and Left Party politicians. Stefan Brangs (SPD), state secretary for labour in the state economic ministry in Saxony, spoke of a shock for the region. Brangs was sent to the eastern region after 1989 by the public sector and transport union (ÖTV), subsequently the united services union ver.di, first to Leipzig and then Dresden.

In 2001, he became ver.di spokesman in Saxony, and from 2004 he sat in Saxony’s state parliament for the SPD. Since 2006, he has also been a member of the SPD’s Saxony state executive. In December 2014, he moved from parliament into the state ministry of economy, labour and transport. He called for conducting talks with the company, stating, “We expect Bombardier to provide a sustainable future concept for the company.” But this is precisely what Bombardier is working on. From the standpoint of the internationally active corporation, the lay-offs are absolutely unavoidable if it is to remain “secure for the future,” a euphemism for maintaining competitiveness.

Mirko Schultze, Left Party state parliament member for Görlitz, expressed his disappointment for workers at

the Görlitz plant and in the region. It was now necessary to try everything “together with IG Metall” to either avoid the cuts or at least “make them in as socially responsible a manner as possible.”

From Diegfried Dainege, the mayor of Görlitz, he demanded a “clear recognition of the workforce’s position.” Prior to taking over the mayoral post at Görlitz city hall in 2012 with the support of the Greens, CDU and the free market FDP, he was a Bombardier manager at the Görlitz facility.

Dainege is a typical example of the transformation of Stalinist bureaucrats. He began working as an engineer at WEB carriage construction in Görlitz in 1979, while at the same time joining the Stalinist state party (SED) and assuming several leading regional positions.

During the reintroduction of capitalism in the GDR in 1990, he was head of production and rose to become director of production (1995) and general manager (1998) for Bombardier Transportation, which took over the remnants of the East German train manufacturing industry. In 2010, he switched to the company’s head office in Berlin, serving for two years as general manager, “Head of Operations Performance Management & Production Technology.”

If the works council and IG Metall now claim to have developed a “plan of action,” which is to commence with nationwide protests at Bombardier sites on March 17, this has only one goal: a means is to be created to allow the justifiably outraged workforce to let off steam, while enforcing the lay-offs and diverting attention away from the close collaboration between IG Metall, the works council and company management.

Behind the scenes, the works council and IG Metall have long reached an agreement with management to facilitate the job cuts. All that is now being negotiated are the conditions and course of action.



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