

More layoffs at Bombardier in Germany

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Federal Economics Minister and Social Democratic Party (SPD) chairman Sigmar Gabriel has become involved in the dispute about the announced mass redundancies at train manufacturer Bombardier Transportation.

Gabriel wanted to meet with the management of the Canadian company, a spokeswoman for the minister said on Tuesday. The meeting, also to be attended by state ministers, trade union and works council representatives, is scheduled for January 9, 2017. A Bombardier spokesman said, “It is important for us that we coordinate closely with politicians and social partners on the future of the plants.”

In February and March 2016, Bombardier announced it would cut around 7,000 jobs worldwide over the next two years, or about 10 percent of the international workforce. Of these, 3,200 jobs were to be eliminated in rolling stock manufacture, which currently comprises nearly 40,000 jobs. In Germany, 1,430 of around 10,000 jobs have already been cut, almost exclusively in the three east German works at Hennigsdorf, Górlitz and Bautzen. In October, the company announced it would cut an additional 7,500 jobs worldwide by the end of 2018, two thirds of them in its rail division.

In early December, citing industry sources, business daily *Handelsblatt* reported Bombardier was cutting 2,500 jobs in its German plants alone. According to *Handelsblatt*, the plants affected are in Saxony, where 1,900 are currently employed, in Górlitz, Bautzen (1,100 current jobs) and at the Brandenburg plant in Hennigsdorf, which has 2,500 employees. In Hennigsdorf alone, 500 jobs will be eliminated by halting production of rail vehicles.

Echoing management, which said it would not confirm any figures, union and works council representatives claimed they had no further information. That is absurd. The union and works council have been negotiating with top management

about the job cuts since March. Moreover, they are in close contact with management through their seats on the supervisory board. For example, the works council chair, Michael Wobst, reported in March that he “feared” that production in Hennigsdorf would be halted. Now this has happened. So from where did these fears arise? What did Wobst know, and what did he conceal? And what is he silent about now?

Meanwhile, the establishment parties are getting involved at Bombardier. On Thursday, the current Christian Democrat-Social Democrat state government in Saxony offered the company tax cuts and other subsidies for the plants in Górlitz and Bautzen. Saxony’s state premier Stanislaw Tillich (CDU, Christian Democratic Union) told the press after the meeting: “We want to preserve Saxony’s traditional rail expertise.” Tillich held out the prospect of unspecified tax breaks to the head of the Railway Technology division, Laurent Troger, and the president and CEO in Germany, Michael Fohrer, for “technological development”. Tillich’s deputy, State Economics Minister Martin Dulig (SPD), also took part in the meeting.

On Wednesday, further talks were held in Berlin between Bombardier managers Troger and Fohrer with the SPD-Left Party state government in Brandenburg. “The state government clearly supports ensuring that Hennigsdorf is maintained as a location for the development and production of rail vehicles”, State Premier Dietmar Woidke (SPD) said.

Besides Woidke, State Economics Minister Albrecht Gerber (SPD) also took part. He had already promised to help Bombardier when visiting Eisenhüttenstadt. The state would use all the means at its disposal to preserve the company’s operations in Brandenburg, he said. Gerber spoke of “research funding”. Unlike his colleague in Saxony, he put a figure on this: 3.3 million.

Ministers' involvement is increasing in proportion to the anger of the Bombardier workers over the ever-increasing numbers of job losses. The announcement, just before Christmas, of 2,500 job cuts in Germany alone, sparked horror and anger in the workforce. Following a factory meeting last week, René Straube, the incoming works council leader at the Görlitz factory, told the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, "The number of colleagues who ask me when we are finally shutting up shop is increasing." By "shutting up shop" he clearly meant strike action, which the works council and unions fear could escalate into a direct conflict with the corporation and its political backers.

In order to maintain control over the workforce and divert attention away from its complicity with management in the implementation of job losses, the IG Metall union and works council representatives have started talking about protests and strikes.

According to Straube, workers at the Bombardier factory in Görlitz will decide about strike action on January 17. He told *Neues Deutschland*, the cuts package has only one obvious purpose: "To satisfy shareholders and creditors".

The main problem for the workers, however, is that neither the works council nor the union has any intention or ability to oppose these attacks. Allied with the big business politicians and tied to capitalism and the national market, the unions are opposed to the mobilisation of workers throughout the company and a common, cross-border struggle to defend all jobs, wages and benefits.

To do this would mean putting the social rights of workers before the profit interests of the big shareholders and creditors and developing a powerful political movement of the working class based on an international socialist perspective. IG Metall opposes such a battle like the plague.

Instead, the union and its works council representatives are colluding with top management to restructure the company at the expense of the workforce. To this end, they submitted their own strategy paper, titled, "Bombardier future (rail) timetable", to top management in April. In the paper, the IG Metall and Bombardier main works council say the company "had manoeuvred into an adverse economic situation in recent years", and they proposed various measures as to how the German plants can be

made "competitive" again.

All IG Metall and its works council representatives want is that they participate in the process of restructuring and cutting jobs. They see themselves as co-managers, not only in the task of making Bombardier profitable, but in the destruction of jobs. They have not publicly opposed job cuts, only compulsory redundancies.

At the beginning of December, the IG Metall district head for Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony, Olivier Höbel, said, "All plans that start from a scenario of compulsory redundancies and mass sackings will encounter resolute opposition from the IG Metall."

IG Metall functionary Höbel, who represents the union on Bombardier's supervisory board, chose his words very carefully: "Resolute opposition" in case of "compulsory redundancies" and "mass sackings". In other words, what he is seeking is restructuring without any compulsory redundancies through the renewal of temporary contracts, the withdrawal of temporary workers, "voluntary" redundancy payments and early retirement.

This is the most common method used by the unions to cut jobs and impose plant closures. Its aim is to divide the workforce, spread insecurity and fear, and prevent a common struggle. Not infrequently, this sellout is initiated by holding a limited protest strike during which the professional trade union functionaries make radical-sounding speeches.



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