

Fight the Ford layoffs! Build rank-and-file committees to unite autoworkers across Europe!

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, Socialist Equality Party, Parti de l'égalité socialiste
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Thursday's announcement by Ford Motor Company that it will shutter plants and lay off thousands of autoworkers across Europe is the latest stage in a global offensive by the auto companies against the jobs, wages and conditions of the working class.

Ford European President Steven Armstrong told the *Financial Times* on Thursday that the layoffs, part of an international \$14 billion cost-cutting plan, would affect a "significant" portion of Ford's 53,000 employees in 19 plants on the continent. He added that although Ford currently plans to maintain operations in Europe, "everything is possible if we can't get the reset done." Thus threats of further cuts that are to be invoked to blackmail workers for more concessions in 2019.

Tens of thousands of workers and their families who have given years of their lives are to be thrown on the scrap heap in what Ford's January 10 press statement calls a "reduction of surplus labor across all functions." This is to include the August 2019 closure of the Ford Aquitaine Industries plant in Blanquefort, the only Ford assembly plant in France, destroying 900 jobs and another 3,000 indirectly, and large job cuts at the Saarlouis Assembly Plant in Germany, where production of the C-Max model is to be discontinued.

At least 370 workers are to be laid off at the Bridgend Assembly plant in south Wales, according to the BBC, with further layoffs expected from among the more than 13,000 Ford employees in Britain. Russian media report that the fate of Ford factories in the country is "sealed," with anticipated closures of plants at Vsevolozhsk near St. Petersburg (2,700 workers) and Naberezhnye Chelny (1,000 workers).

The working class cannot accept the "right" of the corporations to shut plants down, decimate entire

communities and destroy the lives of tens of thousands of workers! Ford's illegitimate actions are motivated by the single-minded desire to funnel ever greater sums of wealth into the pockets of its billionaire shareholders and financial speculators. Last year Ford paid out \$2.3 billion in dividends alone, equivalent to \$43,000 for every European autoworker.

A struggle must be organized by workers against all closures, layoffs and concessions, through the formation of rank-and-file workplace committees at plants across Europe, to establish lines of communication with workers at plants internationally and organize a united counteroffensive.

No faith can be placed in the trade unions, who will oppose nothing. Whether it be the CGT in France, the Unite union in the UK, IG Metall in Germany, or elsewhere, they all work as arms of management against workers. The single honest statement in Ford's January 10 press release is its labeling of these organizations as its "trade union partners," with whom it will work in pursuing its "comprehensive transformation strategy."

The Unite union in the UK has already made clear it will encourage "voluntary" redundancies in order to assist Ford and demobilize workers' opposition. Officer Des Quinn declared that "the challenge for government, the carmakers and the unions" is to "maintain the environment" for the "success" of British manufacturing—meaning nothing more than workers in the UK accepting lower wages and more exploitative conditions.

As for IG Metall, its attitude was expressed most bluntly by the Ford Joint Works Council leader Martin Hennig last August, when he boasted that Ford is

“going well and we make good money with them,” before adding that “we have to take costs into account. That must be the most important task of management.” Hennig complained about the number of workers over 50. “At such an age,” he said, “workers already have ailments.”

The unions across Europe have called no strikes, because they are working to push the cuts through at Ford and the entire industry. Last November, General Motors announced the closure of five plants in Canada and the US, and another two as yet unidentified plants outside North America.

In Europe, as Ford announced mass layoffs, Jaguar Land Rover confirmed 4,500 jobs cuts over the next year. French carmaker PSA is now closing plants across Europe, destroying more than 3,700 full-time positions at its subsidiary Opel in Germany and hundreds at Vauxhall in the UK. In Germany, Volkswagen plans to slash 7,000 jobs at Hannover and Emden.

As they help plan this onslaught, the unions aim to divide autoworkers in different countries and at different companies from each other. They pit workers against one another in a global race to the bottom, pushing workers to accept lower wages and conditions in every country in order to remain “internationally competitive.”

The way forward for workers is to break free of the organizational stranglehold of the unions and wage an independent, international struggle. Workers need new organizations—rank-and-file workplace committees, democratically controlled by the workers—to unify and mobilize the workers internationally in defense of the social right to a job.

Such a fight by autoworkers would win immense support in the working class amid growing opposition among workers to social inequality, militarism and austerity and the big business policies of capitalist governments internationally. The year 2018 witnessed an initial eruption of working class struggle internationally, including mass teachers strikes in the United States, and closed with the ongoing Yellow Vest demonstrations in France, which are animated by deep anger over social inequality and the pro-business policies of the Macron government.

Last Tuesday, GM workers in Oshawa, Canada, downed tools in a wildcat sit-down strike—initiated

independently of the Unifor union—after GM confirmed the planned closure of the plant at the end of 2019. On December 9, autoworkers from all three US carmakers and other workers and young people attended a meeting in Detroit, Michigan, organized by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party and voted unanimously to establish independent rank-and-file committees to organize a fight against General Motors’ planned layoffs.

The critical task confronting workers is to develop an independent political struggle, in opposition to all the parties and organizations that defend capitalism. The ruling classes in every country today offer the populations a future of austerity, trade wars and “great power” military conflicts, growing social inequality, and a turn towards police-state repression and dictatorship to suppress popular opposition.

The answer is the taking of power by the working class as part of the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe, and the reorganization of economic life by the working class to meet social need, not private profit. This will include turning the giant automotive corporations into public utilities under the democratic control of the workers. The European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International are intervening in the European elections to fight for this perspective.

The Socialist Equality Parties and the *World Socialist Web Site* will give every assistance to workers who wish to organize a fight against the auto layoffs and link up with their counterparts internationally, and we urge workers to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact