

Germany: 3,000 Bosch workers protest in Stuttgart against job cuts

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On March 13, approximately 3,000 Bosch workers marched through the neighbourhood of Feuerbach in the city of Stuttgart to protest against impending job cuts. The Bosch company is using the introduction of electric-powered cars to press ahead with the biggest job cuts in its history.

The Bosch plant in Feuerbach-Stuttgart has been in operation since 1910 and is one of the world's largest manufacturers of diesel components. Eight thousand workers build diesel motor products, including injection technology, ignition and exhaust gas filters. In total, more than 13,000 employees are employed at Bosch-Feuerbach.

After the criminal manipulation of Volkswagen diesel emissions tests was made public in September 2015, Bosch experienced a rapid decline in demand for its products. The Bosch plants in Feuerbach, Homburg (Saar) and Bamberg employ around 15,000 workers, while the company has a total workforce of 50,000 worldwide.

So far, the company has refused to provide information on how many workers will lose their jobs in the process of the transition to electric mobility. After the demonstration, the manager of Bosch, Uwe Gackstatter, spoke vaguely of a "structural break" and said: "We will not be able to keep the current level of employment," due to "the slump in orders for diesel engine components."

In January, 600 jobs were cut in Homburg and Bamberg, and it is feared all 15,000 workers could lose their jobs should all three plants close down. In Feuerbach, one worker told the WSWS that management was systematically preparing to cease production and shut down the entire Feuerbach plant, eliminating all 8,000 diesel component jobs.

In Homburg, a plant closure would affect 4,100

workers. Bosch produces solely diesel injection pumps at this site and refuses to invest in alternative products. Four hundred jobs have already been slashed.

In the tone of a company manager, Oliver Simon, the head of factory works council in Homburg, declared: "So far, we have been able to compensate for the declining demand for passenger cars with a boom for commercial vehicles, but here, too, we are experiencing a massive slump."

The works council has already agreed that contractual holidays be used this year to extend weekends and that the Christmas holidays be extended. Shift workers can also choose additional holidays instead of a wage increase, in accordance to the last contract agreed by the IG Metall trade union. In both Homburg and Bamberg, workers are being told that using this alternative could prevent further job losses.

The chairman of IG Metall, Jörg Hofmann, has conducted secret talks behind closed doors with Bosch management for many years. Following a conversation with the Homburg management in September 2018, Hofmann told *Deutschlandfunk* that the company was evidently planning to "phase out the plant in line with declining demand." Hofmann continued: "In the long term such a closure is unacceptable. The issue is not making the closure socially acceptable, but rather providing perspectives for the plant."

In fact, the IG Metall-controlled works councils act as Bosch's closest accomplices when it comes to enforcing the "re-modelling" of plants at the expense of the workforce. IG Metall works councils have been negotiating with management since October 2018 on "restructuring." For its part, management has responded with job cuts and a proposal for a 30-hour week without compensation of wages.

On February 14, the works councils at all the Bosch

plants issued their “Bamberg Declaration” in which they complain of management’s attempt to “play off plants against one another.” Bosch, the declaration continues, had no perspective for the plants, nor are any investments in “future products” planned.

IG Metall is mainly concerned with ensuring that Bosch continues to make profits. The union has already accepted in principle that job cuts, plant closures and wage cuts are inevitable.

The Bamberg Declaration states, “The challenges are huge, and the issues are very complex. There are no easy answers. But we are firmly convinced that there are possible solutions. Our goal is to secure industrial manufacturing and development in Germany.”

No worker knows what concessions the IG Metall works councils have already made in the course of negotiations. When asked at a special works meeting that preceded the demonstration, several workers confirmed that no details had been reported about the negotiations. Instead, the works councils have only repeatedly appealed to management to put forward constructive solutions.

IG Metall organises protests such as the March 13 demo to allow workers to let off steam, while carrying out talks with management behind the backs of the workforce. Increasingly however, workers realise that the union does not represent their interests, and that, on the contrary, IG Metall constitutes a mechanism to control workers in the interests of the profit system and suppress any independent resistance.

Fewer and fewer workers are prepared to follow the calls for protest made by the union. It came as no surprise that IG Metall announced in a press release prior to the demonstration that it anticipated 5,000 participants but only around 3,000 workers showed up.

Nevertheless, the demonstration expressed the anger growing among thousands of workers in the auto supply industry. Last week, the Schaeffler auto parts company also announced a further 900 job cuts.

The billion-dollar investments of corporations in the development of electric vehicles will completely transform the auto industry. The future of many thousands of jobs is in danger. To defend their jobs, workers must organise independently of IG Metall and the trade unions and conduct their struggle on the basis of a socialist and international perspective.



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