

# Ford workers in Germany discuss impending job cuts with SGP candidate

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Dietmar Gaisenkersting, European election candidate of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), spoke to Ford workers in Cologne, Germany, last week in the wake of the company's announcement of a massive restructuring plan.

On May 20 Ford management in the US announced the slashing of 7,000 jobs worldwide. Those immediately affected are white-collar workers employed in development, research and administration.

Previously Ford had announced it would destroy 5,000 jobs in Germany. The company is also shedding thousands of jobs in Britain, France, Russia, Brazil and China, with several plants set for closure. Ford workers in Cologne face the loss of 3,400 jobs under the cuts announced by management.

Financial markets have indicated dissatisfaction with the scale of the cuts, demanding more. An analyst at US investment bank Morgan Stanley said Ford would have to lay off another 23,000 employees to meet its cost-cutting goals.

Ford workers confront not only an aggressive management driven by an insatiable lust for profits, but union organizations that are in the pockets of the employers. In Germany the IG Metall union is siding with management in imposing the job cuts, suppressing any serious fight to defend jobs.

Ford is currently accelerating its global restructuring. The car producer has hired a new chief financial officer who had previously worked at the online retail giant Amazon and is now bringing Amazon's extreme conditions of exploitation to the auto industry.

In speaking to Ford workers Gaisenkersting stressed the necessity of workers adopting an international socialist strategy to defend jobs.

What emerged from the discussions with Ford

workers was that the IG Metall union works closely with and acts essentially as part of management, making workers feel isolated and abandoned. This situation has encouraged an atomization of the workforce and a search for individual solutions.

Among the common questions workers are raising: "Do I give up my job and take severance pay? Should I look for a new job? Do I go self-employed? Should I retire now?"

IG Metall and the works council are deliberately encouraging an individualist outlook to prevent a common fight.

Over the past several years IG Metall and its works council representatives have justified a series of plant closures, job reductions, attacks on wages and the undermining of working conditions, including the closure of the Opel plant in Bochum five years ago, on the grounds that they are necessary for German industry to compete on the world market.

In the German Ford plants, the IG Metall works council representatives are now taking on the task of developing the programmes that will force workers out of the company through redundancy, compensation packages or early retirement.

The incentives paid to higher seniority workers to leave their jobs pay off for the company in the long run since these higher seniority workers can be replaced by lower-paid workers with inferior benefits. Although some older employees are offered relatively high severance pay, those who were hired at lower wages after 2005—following the introduction of the Enterprise Fee Framework Agreement (ERA) agreed by the IG Metall and management—receive significantly less.

Several older workers told members of the SGP campaign team they were considering accepting the compensation offered. But they are in a quandary

because they know that jobs will then be irrevocably lost for the younger generation. And it is also only a matter of time before the creeping job losses have progressed so far that the entire site, the company's European headquarters, which currently employs 17,000, could face closure.

"At some point they will close the whole thing here," said one worker. His colleague recalled the closure of the Ford plant in Genk, Belgium. "That was closed completely in 2014." "That's capitalism," a worker added sarcastically, implicitly agreeing that the fight against job closures requires a socialist perspective.

A Turkish worker summed up the atmosphere in the factory with the words, "Everyone is worried about their jobs here." The discontent was very great, but a kind of tense silence still prevailed, he said.

Gaisenkersting stressed that the defence of jobs required that workers break through the straitjacket of the IG Metall. Workers, he said, needed to see themselves as part of an international class, not as individuals who are powerless when confronted with global corporations.

He pointed out that the approximately 200,000 Ford workers worldwide are a mighty force. And they are not alone. All global auto companies are planning or executing job cuts: General Motors is cutting 14,000 jobs, Volkswagen 7,000, Jaguar Land Rover (Tata Motors) 4,500 and Tesla 3,000.

Gaisenkersting urged Ford workers to familiarize themselves with the socialist programme and the international perspectives of the SGP.

Björn, a Ford worker, has known of the program of the SGP for some time. He said he agreed with the call for development of a struggle independent of the IG Metall. "Independent organizations are necessary," he said. "At the moment, only the IG Metall and the management are acting. The workers are going under, their interests are not considered."

He said that he believes that he and his colleagues need to be prepared for further attacks. "Now, when I read that bankers are calling for 23,000 employees to be laid off, I know there's more to come."

What upset him most is the greed of the management and the super-rich. "Ford makes profits, it's in the black. But that's still too little for the managers. This greed is taking over. We are supposed to pay for that—for the super-rich. That's unacceptable."

Asked about the European elections, Björn said that he had never voted. "No party wholeheartedly speaks to me. You only have the choice between several evils." He went on to say he wanted to read the SPG election manifesto before the voting. "I'm not sure why, but I'm interested in politics right now. Doing nothing is not a solution."

Björn's experience is not unique. Workers all over the world are coming to recognize that the day-to-day reality of capitalism means their jobs and wages are being sacrificed to fatten the profits of wealthy shareholders.

At the center of the SGP campaign in the European elections is the fight for workers to recognize they face the same problems and the same enemy all over the world. The SGP calls for workers to establish independent action committees to take the defence of jobs into their own hands. These committees would network workers internationally and prepare for strikes to oppose all plant closures and mass layoffs.

This can only be successful if it is connected to the building of an international socialist movement. As the WSWS wrote last week: "If the social rights of workers and their families for secure jobs and income are to take precedence over the profits of billionaire bankers and millionaire corporate executives, then workers must expropriate the private property of the capitalist class and transform the auto industry into a publicly owned utility, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class."

This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International fight for.



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