

Ford Motors to cut another 800 jobs in Germany

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Ford Motors' German subsidiary, headquartered in Cologne, has announced 800 new job cuts.

Last week the IG Metall trade union announced 600 job losses. On January 18, the management of GFT (Getrag-Ford Transmissions GmbH), a joint venture between Ford and supplier company Magna, informed the Cologne workforce that 200 jobs would be eliminated.

While the IG Metall union is not disclosing where the 600 jobs at Ford will be cut, the 200 jobs at GFT result from the closure of Ford's transmission development centre, which employs a total of 400 people. This means 200 workers will lose their jobs, 100 are to transfer to new jobs in the Ford group, and the remaining 100 will be shunted off to a so-called "transfer company," their ultimate fate unknown.

On Wednesday, the 400 workers at the transmission development centre protested the planned closure by remaining in their cars in the company parking lot and honking their horns during a plant meeting.

Ford and the Canadian-Austrian auto supplier Magna had already decided at the end of August last year to end their cooperation with GFT. Shortly before Christmas the GFT management announced a holiday "surprise" when it informed its "venerable employees" that they had to prepare for drastic cuts.

The two corporations are splitting up GFT. Magna will get the transmission plant in Bordeaux, France, which will continue to make transmissions for the Ford Fiesta. Ford will keep its factory in Cologne, which produces light commercial vehicle transmissions, and its plant in Halewood, UK, which produces transmissions for some Kuga and Focus models, among others. The development centre will be wound up by the works council and management. Both bodies are determining who will move to the main plant in Cologne, who will join the transfer company and which workers will be made redundant.

As usual, the central role in the job cuts is played by IG Metall and its affiliated Cologne Works Council, chaired by Martin Hennig.

In March 2019, Ford announced plans to cut 25,000 jobs

worldwide, including 12,000 in Europe and more than 5,000 in Germany. Plants have been or will be closed in Brazil, France and Wales, along with up to four production sites in Russia.

The job cuts have been implemented in every country by the trade unions and their company representatives, and in Germany and Europe by Hennig, who is also chairman of the European Works Council, together with his fellow union colleagues.

Shortly before Christmas, Hennig gave an interview to the German Press Agency (dpa) in which he summed up with satisfaction the job cuts he had already implemented. By the end of the year, the workforce in Germany will have been reduced by 4,900 to just under 20,000 compared to the beginning of 2019, Hennig reported. "The job cuts are painful, but in view of the overall situation, we have managed this reasonably."

Just over 15,000 workers remain in Cologne, and 4,500 in Saarlouis, plus around 200 at the Ford development centre in Aachen. Hennig proudly explained that a total of 5,400 jobs were to be cut, 500 more than had been implemented by the end of last year.

Despite the difficult situation, Hennig claimed in his interview that the job cuts at Ford Germany were now over. "There will be no more major cuts for now." This statement was a deliberate lie and served solely to pacify staff. The half-life of this lie was just three weeks!

The grandiose declaration that cutbacks at Ford had been reduced was also a lie. Instead, Hennig and the works council ensured that these cutbacks would take place in affiliated supply companies.

Employees whose jobs had been eliminated, Hennig said, had been retrained and are now working in areas where outside contractors were previously used. For example, Ford employees would now take over the final assembly of doors. In the style of a purchasing manager, Hennig explained, "The cost calculation showed this is more favourable for the company. Sometimes outsourcing does not pay off, top management has also recognized that."

What Hennig did not tell dpa was that bringing previously outsourced jobs back to the Ford plant (insourcing) merely shifts job destruction to suppliers and plays off one part of Ford's workforce against another.

When Magna and Ford announced the dissolution of their GFT joint venture late last summer, Hennig claimed, "For the workforce, this is a slap in the face." The plans came as a complete surprise, he said. "We will fight tooth and nail to make sure no jobs are lost."

The same spectacle was repeated only a short time later in October of last year. IG Metall reported that Ford had terminated its contract with Faurecia Interior Systems effective April 15, 2021. The union declared that a production cutback was planned at Ford in Cologne from January, which would result in surplus personnel at Ford. The union claimed these workers could be employed in the company's own door production, while Faurecia workers, who had formerly assembled the doors in the immediate vicinity of the Ford plant, will lose their jobs.

Three months ago Kerstin Klein, deputy representative and manager of IG Metall for Cologne-Leverkusen, demanded that job cuts be cushioned by transfers to vacant jobs and training programs at Ford. "Employees affected by job losses must have access to existing retraining and education programs as well as the job exchange scheme at Ford plants."

Once again, Cologne-based IG Metall claimed that both cuts in production and the "insourcing" of door manufacturing had not been discussed with Ford and Faurecia works councils.

Who can believe this? Such plans are discussed in all of the economic and personnel committees of the works councils, but not, workers are to believe, this time at Ford in Cologne?

IG Metall and its works councils have been implementing cutbacks for years. The union's most favoured method is to divide workers between those employed in different factories all over the world, between the employees of the Ford factories in Cologne and Saarlouis, between workers at Ford and those working for suppliers, and even inside one production facility, between those working in administration and those in production.

For example, union representatives at Ford in Cologne are spreading the rumour that the 600 jobs to be cut were to be eliminated in administration, but that the workers there were not prepared to quit. The ones who will suffer ultimately are then production workers, whose jobs will allegedly be lost due to economic necessity.

As if the planned job cuts in administration could not be carried out because no one was willing to volunteer to quit!

The union's policy of "slash and burn" will also be used

this spring when Ford management announces where the company's first electric auto is to be built in Europe. Two plants are competing for the contract, the factories in Cologne and Craiova, Romania.

It is safe to assume that Hennig is already trying to convince management in secret talks to build the e-model in Cologne. Possibly the elimination of another 600 jobs is already part of such a deal. Even now, Hennig has indicated that, despite the most recent cuts, there would be no let-up in downsizing.

The potential for related job creation was limited, Hennig told dpa. After all, the platform, the substructure including the e-motor and battery, stems from Volkswagen with Ford responsible only for final assembly. "The value added would be significantly lower than if we produced our own auto with a combustion engine."

The works council under Hennig is doing everything in its power to maintain Ford's future profitability. This is evident not only in the job cuts that have now been taking place for two years, but also in its attitude toward dealing with the Corona pandemic.

Immediately after the first outbreak of the virus in Germany last year, it spread quickly among Ford workers, although the workforce does not receive exact figures on colleagues who have been infected and those who have died. Workers told WSWS that a company driver who delivers material and components for the assembly line died after contracting Covid-19 last year. The worker was due to retire shortly prior to his death.

To defend their lives, health and jobs, Ford workers must organise independently of the union and unite internationally. They must build independent action committees and establish contact with workers throughout the auto industry and other sections of workers.

Auto production does not count as an essential industry and must be suspended until the spread of the coronavirus is stopped, with workers paid in full until they can return to their jobs. The *World Socialist Web Site* and its *Autoworker Newsletter* are calling on all those who want to join in this principled struggle against the spread of the coronavirus, layoffs and plant closures to get in touch.



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