

Reject the union's new plan to close Continental's Karben plant in Germany! Vote No again!

Network of Action Committees for Safe Workplaces
6 June 2021

To Continental workers at the Karben plant in Hesse, Germany!

The Network of Action Committees for Safe Workplaces calls on you to vote “No” and reject the closure plan that the IG Metall union is now putting to the vote again. At the same time, you should prepare to build an independent action committee to take up the struggle to save all jobs.

Do not let IG Metall blackmail you. You are being asked to vote on a collective agreement by Monday evening that you will only be able to see in full on Monday morning. Reject the whole procedure. It only serves to close down your plant, as demanded by the top management.

In mid-May, you had already courageously rejected the so-called “social contract” agreed by IG Metall and management. Although you wanted to fight to preserve your jobs, IG Metall had agreed that your plant would be closed as planned, with just a slight delay, except for a small remnant.

This is not being changed now. Even in the new agreement, the plant in Karben will be closed, with the loss of over a thousand jobs. The announced closure is only to be postponed from 2023 to 2025. Step by step, more than two-thirds of the 1,088 jobs are to be eliminated, with 150 colleagues winding up what is left of the plant. All that will then remain is a rump operation with 187 employees who will work for Continental Engineering Services (CES).

To be clear: with the current “social contract,” IG Metall wants to push through the plant closure. Do not let this happen!

Like you, we also have not seen the contract, but it serves the well-known method of divide and rule.

According to the union's press release, it differs from the last agreement only in that the severance pay for older workers is to be increased. It also includes a hardship fund for IG Metall members of one million euros, which the union will control.

In purely arithmetical terms, a 58-year-old worker could receive a severance payment of 180,000 euros, and the bourgeois media is deliberately emphasising this. We do not know to how many workers this applies. But we are aware that those of you who were there when the plant opened in 1981 have sacrificed your lives and often your health for the profits of Continental and Schaeffler over these 40 years. A high severance payment can seem tempting, and it is meant to.

But consider this: firstly, it buys the plant closure at the expense of the younger generation, who will then no longer find industrial jobs in the region. Do not let yourselves be divided between young and old. All for one, one for all!

And secondly, do the math. At 58, it is unlikely you will find a comparably paid job. After two years of unemployment benefit, you will fall back onto the Hartz IV welfare benefits. Since these are means-tested, apart from a basic exemption of around 10,000 euros and at most the value of a small owner-occupied flat, everything remaining from your severance pay will be counted as assets and must be used to pay your day-to-day living expenses.

Do not let IG Metall divide you over the question of union membership either. The concessions that the union has always demanded from you have applied to the whole workforce. Everyone had to work harder and give up holiday and Christmas bonuses and special

payments. Now, IG Metall wants to make many of its negotiated “social contract” conditions available only to its members. But one in four or five of you is not in IG Metall. Do not let yourselves be divided. Here, too, the same applies—equal rights for all.

But above all, do not let yourselves be divided by location. Continental wants to eliminate 13,000 jobs at over thirty locations and close several plants. The union is letting each workforce fight on its own, which means they can only lose.

The tire plant in Aachen will close in 2022—1,800 workers will lose their jobs. Another 2,100 colleagues fear for their jobs in Regensburg at the drive division, Vitesco Technologies. In Roding, 520 jobs are at stake. In the Babenhausen plant, not far from you, 2,570 workers are being fobbed off with a “social contract” like yours, so that they accept the plant closure in installments. At the end of 2025, only 434 permanent full-time workers will be left in Babenhausen.

The protests that IG Metall is organising at each site are solely to blow off steam. When you had prepared to take real industrial action, namely an indefinite strike, the union quickly agreed on the first “social contract,” presenting it with the deceitful title: “Conti Karben: Plant Closure Averted.”

IG Metall has both feet in the enemy camp. Last year, when Continental announced it would cut 30,000 jobs, 13,000 of them in Germany, the union tacitly accepted this. Their only thought was how to push it through against your resistance.

The IGM officials are well paid for their services. Christine Benner, deputy chairperson of IG Metall, sits on the Continental supervisory board, receiving 269,000 euros last year as deputy board chair; Hasan Allak, your group works council chair from the IG BCE union, received 183,000 euros; and Lorenz Pfau, the general works council chair of Continental Automotive GmbH, received 182,000 euros.

The labour director Dr Ariane Reinhart, who is to push through the destruction of 30,000 Conti jobs, only gained her lucrative job with the consent of IG Metall. While a billion euros are being saved on your backs, the salary of this former VW executive has been increased by almost 300,000 euros. As reported by *Manager Magazin*, Reinhart can earn up to 6.7 million euros a year since last year due to a change in remuneration, 2.2 million euros more than in 2019,

before the coronavirus pandemic.

IG Metall had already brazenly described the first closure plan as a “solid negotiation result.” You were right to reject it. Now take the next step: vote “No” to the new, barely improved second “social contract” as well!

Above all, build your own action committee that can decide and act independently of IG Metall. This is necessary to represent your interests against those of the company and its shareholders. The action committee must represent all the workers in Karben and above all make contact with the other Continental plants in Germany and abroad to coordinate joint action.

The decision on the Karben plant has far-reaching significance: under conditions of global competition and capitalist private enterprise, the restructuring towards e-mobility and digital transport will threaten hundreds of thousands of jobs in the coming years. That is why the battle at Continental is not only being followed closely by the stock exchange, corporations, trade unions and politicians of all stripes. Millions of workers in the auto and supplier industries are also affected, and the name Continental is familiar to most of them.

Workers in all countries face the same problems and are confronted with the same big corporations and their representatives in the trade unions. But if we unite and fight together, we are stronger than our opponents!

Contact us through the *World Socialist Web Site* to prepare further steps in the struggle at Continental and discuss joint international action against the attacks by corporations and governments around the globe.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact