

Continental/Vitesco workers: Vote against IG Metall and management's plan to close the plant! Build rank-and-file committees to defend all jobs!

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
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The contract ballot has opened at the Bebra-Mühlhausen plant of the Continental subsidiary Vitesco. As in the Conti plants in other parts of Germany, the IG Metall union has negotiated a so-called “social contract” with management that seals the fate of another Conti site and liquidates at least 400 more jobs.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the *World Socialist Web Site* call on all workers of Bebra and Mühlhausen to vote “No” and reject the new sell-out by IG Metall and its works council. At the same time, we offer to assist in building a rank-and-file committee to organise the strike that workers have already voted to approve, and to make it the starting point for a broad mobilisation of Conti workers at all sites.

Two weeks ago, the workforces in Bebra and Mühlhausen voted by almost 92 percent in favour of an indefinite strike. This decision to strike showed workers’ willingness to fight and their determination to defend all jobs. In Mühlhausen, courageous actions by some workers in defence of jobs had already prevented the removal of machines in January.

But IG Metall refused to organise a strike then and continued negotiations. Now, it is presenting a negotiated result that includes the gradual destruction of jobs and closure of the plant in Mühlhausen, completely against the original demands of the workers.

As always, IG Metall is using its familiar tricks. It is keeping the exact wording of the contract secret, publishes only excerpts, in agreement with management. It is trying to gloss over the result and divides workers with allegedly high severance payments for long-term employees. At the same time, it is threatening that a rejection of the sell-out would lead to mass layoffs and plant closures without a severance package.

Through this blackmail, IG Metall and its works council representatives are trying to push through the decision of

company management and the filthy-rich owners, the Schaeffler family, to cut 30,000 jobs worldwide and close several plants against the resistance of the workers. This is exactly the pattern that has already been used to organise massive job cuts and closures at the Conti plants in Aachen, Regensburg, Babenhausen, Rheinböllen, Karben and many others.

It is time to break the chain of these ongoing closures and job massacres and to cast a clear “No” vote in the ballot, which will run until 5 August!

In doing so, it is necessary to counter the lies of IG Metall, which claims that the negotiated result is the best for all parties involved; that nothing more can be achieved. The union boasts it has succeeded in reducing the job cuts to 200 and the postponement of the closure of the Mühlhausen plant until the end of 2024.

The fact is that the Mühlhausen plant, with its 150 employees, will not be retained but will be completely closed in three years at the latest, and this closure is being initiated now. At the end of next year, only 88 workers are to remain in Mühlhausen, who will then essentially have to wind up operations.

In Bebra, the workers themselves are to set in motion the so-called “transformation,” in which several hundred more jobs will be destroyed. A Conti press release states that in Bebra, “the workforce is to be adjusted to the sales expectations in the area of combustion engine technologies.” According to IG Metall figures, 550 of 800 jobs are to remain here by 2025. Thus, in Bebra and Mühlhausen 400 jobs will be destroyed, not 200 as IG Metall claims.

Nothing will be achieved with a “Yes” vote. The destruction of jobs will continue the social decline and drive more and more families into poverty and hardship. Last year alone, 40 percent of workers suffered a loss of income. Thirteen million people were living in poverty, the highest

number since German reunification in 1990. On the other hand, the number of billionaires is growing. A severance package is not a way out. It is quickly used up and is included in the calculation of any welfare benefits. Young people cannot find work and have no future.

A “No” vote begins the resistance against the trade union sell-out.

The decision to strike two weeks ago has made clear that workers want to fight. But developments show it is not possible to beat back the corporate attacks without breaking with the unions. Over the past decades, the trade unions have turned into co-managers who are completely on the side of management. They do not represent the workers but the employers. They suppress the class struggle while the super-rich line their pockets at the expense of the workers.

In return for their services, union officials are paid handsomely. The list of so-called “workers’ representatives” who collect fat paycheques on Continental’s supervisory board is long. In addition to Christiane Benner (IG Metall deputy chair), they include Hasan Allak (chair of the general works council), Francesco Grioli (member of the IG BCE union executive board), Michael Ighaut (chair of the Conti/Teves works council in Frankfurt), Dirk Nordmann (chair of the Conti-Vahrenwald works council), Lorenz Pfau (chair of the Conti-Automotive general works council), Jörg Schönfelder (chair of the Euro works council) and Kirsten Vörkel (chair of the Vitesco Dortmund works council). Workers’ interests can only be defended against these co-managers.

A “No” vote is an important step in the struggle for a new strategy and a new programme to defend all jobs. Many workers at all Continental sites, and beyond in other car plants, would enthusiastically welcome such a decision. Workers everywhere face the same attacks and problems.

The jobs massacre at Continental is part of an international corporate offensive that has intensified with the coronavirus pandemic. In the German auto and supplier industries alone, several hundred thousand jobs are at stake.

Resistance to this is growing. The Conti workers are not alone. Their conflict with IG Metall is also part of an international development. Wherever workers fight back, they are confronted not only by the companies but also by trade unions that sabotage their struggle, isolate them, and form a common front with the corporations.

In Belgium, Volvo Cars workers are fighting an agreement between the company and the union to extend the working week. In Sudbury, Canada, 2,450 miners have rejected a union-backed contract and have been on strike for two months. In Turkey, thousands of electricity workers are fighting against sell-out contracts agreed to by the union with spontaneous strikes .

The industrial action at Volvo Trucks in Dublin, Virginia, the fourth-largest truck manufacturer in the world, is particularly significant. The 3,000 workers went on strike for five weeks against a contract that maintains their poor working conditions and wages. Four times, by a large majority, they voted down a contract agreed by IG Metall’s American sister organisation, the UAW.

The workers were only able to wage their struggle because they built an independent rank-and-file committee, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which opposed the union sell-out, kept workers informed and mobilised support. In the meantime, while the UAW has pushed through a return to work, the VWRFC has shown how the struggle must be waged. It established links with other plants in the US and around the world, providing a clear strategic alternative to the united front of the company and the trade unions.

Workers in Bebra and Mühlhausen who want to defend their jobs must also build a rank-and-file committee that is controlled by the workers and accountable to them and is independent of IG Metall and the works council.

Such a committee would lead the “No” campaign, organise the strike that has already been decided, contact all the other Conti sites to extend the strike and mobilise support across the working class at home and abroad.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, of which the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is the German section, took the initiative on 1 May to create the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to provide a framework for new forms of independent and democratic fighting organisations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces internationally.

We invite all Conti workers to contact the International Workers Alliance through the WSWS. We will actively support them in building a rank-and-file committee and establishing international contacts.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact