

14,000 Airbus workers take part in “warning” strikes in Germany

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Last week, over 14,000 employees of Airbus and its subsidiary Premium Aerotec took part in “warning” strikes across Germany. According to the trade union IG Metall entire production shifts were cancelled at the company’s north German plants in Bremen, Hamburg, Nordenham, Stade and Varel, as well as in Augsburg (Bavaria). The work stoppages began on December 2 and were expected to continue until the weekend.

The protest is directed against plans announced in April to cut thousands of jobs in civil aircraft production across Europe. Due to the corona pandemic, there were no pickets or protest events, only an online event. With growing anger against the planned cuts, IG Metall called the limited actions to let off steam. The union is completely prepared to accept the job cuts and other cost-cutting measures, as long as union officials are involved in the planning and execution of the cuts.

In July 2020, when a drop in aircraft orders and the postponement of deliveries led to rumours of massive cuts, IG Metall officials stressed their understanding for the cost-cutting measures and praised the union’s long-standing collaboration with management, officially embodied in the German system of “social partnership.” The union recognised it must take into account the interests “of the company to make profits” as well as the interests of shareholders by “guaranteeing them a good return on investment,” assured Michael Leppek, head of IG Metall in Augsburg, in a podcast interview with a local newspaper.

Over a month ago, at the end of October, Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury announced company profits of €4.5 billion (before interest and taxes) for the first nine months of the year. These profits are the result of the “Odyssey” rationalisation programme unveiled in summer 2020, which envisages cuts of 15,000 jobs

worldwide, including 5,000 in Germany.

Most of the planned job cuts at German sites have already been implemented, with workers at Airbus and Premium-Aerotec forced out with severance payments or early retirement schemes, which IG Metall claimed avoided compulsory redundancies. Daniel Friedrich, the district leader of IG Metall Küste, declared, “The threatened redundancies are off the table. Instead, there are intelligent solutions.” This is all IG Metall and the works councils have to offer workers after months-long “negotiations” with management.

The company’s German works council complained after Airbus management informed the European Works Council on 21 April about its plans to restructure the company. The new programme is supposed to affect the aircraft components division, especially fuselage sections, floor structures, wing components, cargo doors and/or pressure bulkheads, from as early as next month. These components are currently manufactured in the Airbus wholly owned subsidiary “Premium Aerotec” with factories in France, Germany and Romania. The division of the former subsidiary is being reintegrated into the main company.

The production of individual parts and small components that also takes place at Aerotec is to be diversified into an independent company that could also manufacture products for other aviation companies. There are 3,500 workers currently employed in the production of such parts in Varel, Augsburg and in Brasov, Romania. This company, under the name ASA, is being offered to investors for purchase.

The latest restructuring affects about 13,000 workers. IG Metall refers to it as a “senseless split” yet when it comes to workers, it is the unions which are splitting and dividing them in the company’s European plants.

Airbus SE is a global aerospace company with over

170 locations worldwide. Without a common European struggle of Airbus workers not a single job can be defended. The various national trade unions act according to the principle of divide and rule. IGM executive member Jürgen Kerner, for example, complained that German factories were being treated less favourably than French locations. “Airbus is mutating more and more into a French listed company with a German branch,” Werner complained.

When 22,000 engineering workers in Cadiz, Spain went on strike for a week last month to keep defend their Airbus plant, IG Metall in Germany did not say a word. Airbus plans to close the entire plant in Puerto Real, a district of Cádiz, by 2024. Together with workers in the supplier industry, the closure of the plant would wipe out over 2,200 jobs. This would be a disaster for the city, which already has an unemployment rate of 34 percent.

The massive strike action by the workforce was suppressed by the Spanish unions, which are no different from IG Metall. Airbus management, the social democratic trade union federation UGT and the Stalinist trade union CCOO, the Spanish coalition government of social democrats and the pseudo-left Podemos together with the Federation of Metal Companies of Cadiz (FEMCA), all agreed to close the Puerto Real plant and make the factory premises available for an unspecified “Industrial Centre for Aviation 4.0.”

Jobs are supposedly secured by the proposal, but this is nothing more than a hollow promise aimed at ending the strike.

The same problems face workers in Germany and all over the world. The unions are imposing job cuts to protect the profits of the corporations. While they organise protests to vent anger, they are feverishly working behind the scenes to finalise the agreements for layoffs and factory closures in exchange for “compensation” or promises of investment plans that are never fulfilled.

The subordination of workers’ interests to profit maximisation must end!

Workers determined to stop the destruction of their jobs, defend their standards of living and prevent plant closures in Puerto Real and other cities, must form **action committees** independent of the nationalist and pro-capitalist unions. IG Metall, UGT, CCOO and the

other unions long ago ceased being genuine workers’ organisations. Instead, they are instruments of the ruling class to impose austerity measures, destroy jobs and enforce wage cuts. Workers should hold meetings in all factories and workplaces to elect committees, led by their most trusted colleagues.

Workers’ struggles must be united. Tens of thousands of workers are affected by similar factory closures, layoff plans and attacks on their working conditions. This is not just happening at Airbus but across all industries. New action committees must link the struggles of all workers through the formation of networks, controlled by rank-and-file workers, to coordinate joint actions across all industries.

Major corporations develop their strategies on a world basis and workers’ must also be guided by an international strategy. The conflict at Airbus is part of the worldwide upsurge of class struggle. The only way to defeat such a huge transnational corporation is through a global perspective and organisation aimed at uniting Airbus workers across national boundaries and with all workers currently engaged in struggle.

The working class needs a socialist perspective and a political party that unites its struggles internationally, the Socialist Equality Party as the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. We call on all workers to take the initiative and get in touch with us to build the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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