IG Metall's idea of solidarity: Wage and social cuts for all

Ford general works council offers concessions at all German locations

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Since IG Metall works council representatives agreed to the "bidding war" between Ford plants in Germany and Spain, they have offered wage cuts, longer working hours, shorter breaks, unpaid overtime and further social cuts. Their willingness to give up everything that previous generations of workers fought for in often long, bitter strikes and disputes knows no bounds.

At the end of January, the two works councils at Saarlouis (Germany) and Almussafes (in the Spanish province of Valencia) submitted their concession offers and, at the same time, declared themselves ready to negotiate more givebacks. The IG Metall (IGM) works council stressed that its offer was only "interim" and that further cuts were quite possible.

Last week, the newspaper *El Periódico de España* then drew attention to the fact that the German Ford works council representatives had extended their offer of cuts to cover workers at all German sites. The "sacrifices," the Spanish newspaper said, would be "extended to the entire workforce in the country."

The newspaper referred to an information bulletin of the German General Works Council (GBR) of December 9, which states: "We have already been told quite clearly that Valencia has considerable advantages over our plant in terms of personnel costs. This is one of the reasons why we, as the general works council and unanimously with all the plant works councils, have informed European management in writing that we are **joining forces** in Germany, **with all our colleagues, to save the plant in Saarlouis**. Saarlouis alone would not stand a chance in this unequal competition, we can only achieve this by standing shoulder to shoulder." (Emphasis in original)

That the GBR is offering cuts at all German sites is confirmed by a letter 16 works council representatives personally handed to Ford's European boss Stuart Rowley on November 18, 2021. Point two of the letter states that competitiveness in Saarlouis can only be improved if all German sites worked together to achieve this. The works councils would not accept a division of the workforce and would "submit a joint proposal."

Then follows the demand to Rowley: "We expect you to accept it as well and to be 100 percent committed to the total cost approach. Where the dollar ultimately comes from must not matter."

The GBR bulletin is a political declaration of bankruptcy by the works council and IG Metall. Under the headline "Solidarity for Saarlouis—A future for all!" GBR Chairperson Martin Hennig asserts that they will not allow another Ford plant in Europe to be wound up "without a word being said." This is followed by the announcement: "We are fighting!"

The "solidarity" of the IG Metall is to lead all Ford workers to the slaughter together. It is the solidarity of the lackeys and accomplices of management and the corporate bosses. This is the argument of corrupt bureaucrats, who have been sitting on company supervisory boards for years, collecting fat supervisory board bonuses on top of their lavish works council salaries. Their arguments are no different from those of management. They too believe that to increase competitiveness and profits, workers must make sacrifices.

The general works councils' call for joint concessions stems from their solidarity with management. This servility only encourages management to launch ever new and ever harsher social attacks.

Workers' solidarity is the exact opposite. It requires a common struggle of all workers at all locations—within

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Germany, Europe and worldwide—against wage cuts and social cuts.

One thing the preachers of "solidarity concessions" have achieved is that they have widened the struggle.

The same arguments with which they are now demanding cuts at all Ford sites mean massive social attacks are also being prepared in other car plants, suppliers and industrial sectors. It could hardly be clearer that the trade unions stand completely on the side of the corporations and have turned into their advisers and stooges.

Ford workers at the other German sites, especially at the European headquarters in Cologne, may be surprised to learn that they too are to pay in this brutal bidding war with their own jobs, wages and working conditions.

The actions of the works councils are meeting with resistance and hatred from workers at all sites. That is why the GBR is keeping all information about its offer for cuts secret.

In Spain, some details became known at the beginning of the week. Public broadcaster À Punt announced that the plan for the Ford plant in Almussafes foresees an extension of the workday by 15 minutes, the introduction of Saturday work for up to 18 days a year, the establishment of a flexible night shift and a partial waiver of wage increases until 2025.

The German works council is now trying to undercut this and has announced further negotiations.

On Tuesday, in a new bulletin, the GBR announced it would not disclose any information. "The duty of confidentiality continues to apply," and the GBR will stick to it. There should be no risk of "disadvantages for Saarlouis" arising from indiscretions, it stated.

The real reason for the secrecy is that the works council fears provoking workers' resistance if the content of their offers for cutbacks became known.

The blackmail continues. Although both the German and Spanish works councils are represented on the European Works Council, they continue to systematically play off the workforces against each other. Both sides eye each other suspiciously, each waiting for the other to make a mistake.

The Spanish majority union UGT reports that the proposal from Saarlouis is ambiguous. It warns that this is so that the German offer can still be amended as soon as details of the Almussafes proposal become public.

What this mutual cutthroat competition amounts to is well known. In 2018-19, when Ford announced it would cut 12,000 jobs across Europe to ensure competitiveness, it was the European trade unions and their shop floor representatives who put the slice-and-dice operation into action.

Since 2018, 2,500 jobs have already been cut at the plant, works council leader Markus Thal explained in Saarlouis. He already knew then that the declaration of intent to maintain the production site beyond 2025 was only a sop to the workers. In truth, all the agreements and "promises" are not worth the paper they are written on. Only these goals count: Profits, share price and shareholder dividends.

Ford's global job cuts are solely for the enrichment of investors and the international moneyed aristocracy.

At the end of last week, the global corporation reported that its profits had quadrupled to $10 billion in 2021. Adding the IPO of electric car maker Rivian, which it owns a significant stake in, last year's net profit was $17.9 billion. Just one year earlier, in 2020, Ford had reported a loss of $1.3 billion.

Ford CEO Jim Farley also held out the prospect of an increase in profits for the current year, saying he expected a profit of up to $12.5 billion, an increase of 25 percent. Workers in Europe are likely to contribute a not insignificant share due to the current bidding war.

Several Ford workers in Saarlouis—supported by colleagues in Cologne—have taken the initiative to organise themselves independently of the works council and IG Metall, to contact the Spanish workers and to discuss and agree upon a common approach.

They are demanding the immediate stop to the bidding war, the disclosure of all agreements or declarations of intent made so far and the withdrawal of all concessions already made.

Workers who understand solidarity to mean mutual support and a coordinated, common struggle to defend wages and social standards—workers who want to take action against the unions' attempts to divide them in Germany as in Spain—should step forward. Take part in building the rank-and-file committee, and contact:

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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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