

What next in the fight against the internal bidding war at Ford in Europe?

Ford Rank-and-File Committee (Germany)

20 February 2022

We demand:

- *Disclosure of all concessions offered thus far on our behalf!*
- *Immediate halt to secret negotiations by the works council and management!*
- *Instead of blackmailing and dividing the workers, cooperation at all locations to defend jobs, wages, and social gains!*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Saarlouis, Valencia and all other locations:

The blackmail at the heart of the intra-company bidding war is increasing. It is becoming ever more clear how important it is that we—those affected—speak out and fight back.

Since our plant managements and works council representatives in Saarlouis (Germany) and Valencia (Spain) submitted their cutback plans at the end of January to Ford Europe headquarters in Cologne, the bad news has been pouring in.

The works councils and trade unions—IG Metall and UGT—know that tens of thousands of jobs in the entire region depend on both plants. If one plant closed, there would be no comparable jobs. The works councils are stoking fears of an imminent plant closure to justify their cowardly capitulation to management and to propose ever more severe cuts.

In Spain, the extent of the concessions offered by the works councils has become known. Although the exact wording of the agreements there is being kept secret, the works council published key points, which include the following:

- A wage freeze for the next four years. The works council calculates that each Ford worker will receive €7,000 less in wages by 2025, which adds up to €42 million handed over by the workforce to the company.
- The extension of daily working time by 15 minutes. That adds up to more than 80 hours a year per employee, a total of about half a million unpaid hours for the year.
- Saturday working for up to 18 days a year.

- The introduction of flexible night shifts, and more.

The works council in Valencia organised a fake online vote with the sole aim of spreading the false message that almost 75 percent of those voting had agreed to the cutback plan. The aim of the voting manoeuvre was to intimidate Spanish colleagues and suppress any resistance.

But only UGT members were allowed to vote. Thus, only about 70 percent of the workforce participated, out of which allegedly almost three-quarters, 3,143 colleagues, voted in favour of the cuts, with 948 rejecting them and 102 abstentions. Members of other unions were not allowed to vote.

Brothers and sisters in Spain: Do not put your trust in the UGT. Who controlled the vote and the count? We know only too well how such voting results come about under the union's supervision. They are a mixture of falsification, fraud and threats.

The German works council wants to undercut the Spanish concessions. It says the offer made at the end of January is only the beginning. It wants to keep negotiating day and night until June and keep adjusting the cuts.

The same thing is happening in Spain. A Spanish newspaper called the procedure a “reverse auction.” The two works councils keep undercutting each other.

Saarlouis works council leader Markus Thal and new Overall Works Council chair Benjamin Gruschka have extended the offer of wage cuts, break reductions, longer work hours and harsher working conditions to cover workers at all Ford sites in Germany.

With all seriousness, the two call this “solidarity for Saarlouis.” It is hard to find words for such hogwash. In the past, workers understood solidarity to mean a common struggle against corporate attacks. Today, Thal and Gruschka want us to believe that it is solidarity if not only one, but all, accept the attacks without a fight.

But the extension of the cuts to all German Ford sites makes clear what is really at stake. The bidding war between our plants is to be the prelude to the imposition of massive wage cuts and a deterioration of social standards in all Ford

plants and throughout the entire auto and supplier industry. Because, why should they stop at Ford? The IG Metall and UGT bureaucrats who are now preaching givebacks will tomorrow use the same arguments to advocate cuts at all the other auto plants, supplier factories and beyond throughout the entire metal-working and electrical industry.

This downward spiral has no limit and leads back to slave labour. If we buckle at Ford now, it will have dire consequences for millions of workers.

The works council bosses Thal and Gruschka and their entourage claim there is no alternative to their cowardly submission to the dictates of the corporate masters, shareholders and stock brokers.

We firmly reject this and stress that the defence of jobs, wages and social gains is possible only through an open struggle against the works council lackeys of corporate management.

Against the profits-above-everything programme of the employers and the unrestrained enrichment of those at the top of Ford we counterpose the programme of international workers' solidarity.

We refuse to allow a handful of super-rich executives and shareholders at the top of the corporation in the US to decide our future and the welfare of our families.

The works council representatives have no right to conduct secret negotiations behind our backs and give back achievements fought for in the past in the collective struggle of the workforce.

Therefore, we demand an immediate halt to the bidding war and full disclosure of all previous agreements.

As an independent rank-and-file committee, we express our mistrust of the works council and demand that the wording of the cutback plan submitted to Ford's European headquarters in Cologne at the end of January be made public, so that every worker can see the conspiracy that is underway and take action against it.

We therefore call on our brothers and sisters at all sites in Germany, Europe and worldwide to prepare protests and fighting measures to force the unrestricted publication of the agreements from the secret negotiations so far.

It is not for a handful of bureaucrats—who, in addition to their top-rate salaries as works council members, collect supervisory board bonuses, meeting fees and expense allowances—to decide our future, but we ourselves.

We are not alone. Ford has almost 200,000 employees worldwide. Colleagues in the US have already expressed their solidarity with us. All over the world, resistance is growing against ever more brutal forms of exploitation—against mass layoffs, plant closures and social attacks. Our struggle at Ford is part of this growing opposition.

The coronavirus pandemic has clearly accelerated and intensified this crisis. The same inhumane approach being carried out in the bidding war at Ford is shaping the criminal herd immunity policy leading to mass infections in factories and schools.

Added to this is the growing threat of war. Never before has the danger of a Third World War been as great as it is today. Instead of conducting a global war against the pandemic, the great powers are gearing up for a war against Russia.

The defence of jobs, wages and social gains therefore goes hand in hand with the fight against the pandemic and the dreadful threat of war.

There is no time to waste. The decision on where production of a new electric model will take place is to be made in the summer. The initiative must be taken out of the hands of the works councils and trade unions.

To resist the blackmail of management and the works councils, a new political orientation is necessary, which starts from the common interests of all workers at all locations and opposes the logic of the capitalist profit system.

We know that almost all of our fellow workers do not support the IG Metall-led works council. But the silent opposition must find organised expression.

This is what our rank-and-file committee is for. We want to discuss the necessary steps to defend our factories and jobs among trusted colleagues.

The first thing is to reject and stop the IG Metall and UGT's division of workers by plant and country. We want to establish contact and exchange ideas with our colleagues in Valencia, but also those in Romania and Turkey.

Together we are strong! Our rank-and-file committee continues the great tradition of workers' struggles and will confidently lead the power of the workforce onto the field of battle.

Do not let yourselves be intimidated! Executives and works councils do not build cars. It is we workers who create value. The shareholders, the executives and the works councils are beneficiaries of our labour.

It is important to act now. Brothers and sisters at all locations: support and spread this call.

Get in touch with us. Send a Whatsapp message to the following number: +491633378340



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact