

German Ford factory faces closure, with the collusion of the union

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The result has come that many workers had feared. On Wednesday, Ford Motor Company officially announced its decision to build its next generation of electric vehicles in Almussafes, Spain, and not its German plant in Saarlouis. The 4,600 workers employed in Saarlouis, plus around 1,500 workers in the adjacent supplier park, face redundancy when production of the Ford Focus ceases at the end of 2025, when the factory is slated to close.

At the same time it was made clear to the 6,000 workers in Spain that they will also suffer as a result of the decision: with wage cuts, longer working times, increased flexibility and, above all, three-digit job cuts.

Many workers in Saarlouis, with whom the WSW was in contact before, during and after the works meeting, were angrier with the union and the hypocritical charade by works council Chairman Markus Thal than with the company announcement. “This is nothing but lies and deception,” one worker declared directly after the works meeting.

Last September the company announced it would close either the German plant in Saarlouis or the Spanish factory in Almussafes near Valencia. At that time the WSW warned that the works councils of both plants were outbidding one another with offers to make cuts, thereby “trying to prove to the company board that their respective site could produce more profitably than the other.” The losers would be Ford employees in both plants.

The works councils in Germany are now pretending they fought to keep the plant open. “We were lied to, cheated and fooled,” claimed Saarlouis works council Chairman Thal. The works councils refer to a “stitch-up” and “sham procedure.”

This turns reality on its head. Yes, it was a “stitch-up,” but the works council and the IG Metall union

were and are part of the game. The works council had sent out notice of the works meeting Wednesday to inform workers about the “status of the bidding competition” more than two weeks ago. Then, allegedly, shortly before the meeting, the works council was informed that the company had decided in favour of the Spanish plant—but nobody believes this.

The works council’s notices informed the workforce they should prepare for an extended meeting Wednesday beginning at 2:00 p.m. that would then reconvene at 7:30 a.m. the next day, “depending on the decision.” It is clear the works council already knew the decision.

While the works meeting was still in progress, flyers were distributed under the heading “breach of promise,” calling for a demonstration and rally. Everything was prepared, the police and the public order officials were informed about the action and were waiting for workers when they left the factory.

“You can’t organise and do something like this in a quarter of an hour,” said one Ford worker. “They knew about it beforehand. I feel like I’ve been had, by the company and the works council.”

The version of the bidding process put forward by IG Metall and the works council at the meeting, the protest rally and in leaflets prepared beforehand can only be described as bold-faced lies. The leaflet of the general works council, signed by its chairmen Benjamin Gruschka and Thal, claims in its very first sentence that the works council had only been informed on the same day.

As if they take the workers for idiots, the pair declared they had “roundly” condemned the bidding competition they had themselves spent months organising! They even had the nerve to claim they had tried to act in concert with their Spanish colleagues. In

fact, they did everything they could to ensure the closure of the Spanish plant by offering job and wage cuts and subsidies in Germany, instead of organising a common struggle against Ford.

It was this spineless and submissive attitude, oriented solely towards the company's profits, that encouraged management to demand even more cuts in Spain and wind up production in Saarlouis.

The works council is now boasting it would have offered up wage cuts not only in Saarlouis but in all of Ford's German plants. According to the twisted thinking of the union bureaucrats, allowing workers in other factories to suffer in the bidding competition amounts to a "declaration of solidarity." Instead of a joint struggle, the joint renunciation of jobs and livelihoods is the new type of solidarity IG Metall is trying to impose.

Thal and Co. are now huffing and puffing about the fact that the company failed to take into account the cuts the union had organised and that Valencia was unfairly awarded the new contract. Their cries of "scandal," "breach of promise" or "fraud" are akin to the pickpocket who shouts, "Stop thief!" They themselves organised the bidding process, hid it from workers and sabotaged any serious struggle to defend jobs.

Even now, the works council and the unions reject any struggle to keep the plant open and are offering their services to Ford management to organise the smooth liquidation of the factory. Employees were due to be informed about further plans on Thursday.

"We will now have to work on alternatives for the Saarlouis plant." This, Thal said, was the most important task for the coming weeks and months. "We, as the general works council, will do that just as intensively as we have done in the last few months." At Wednesday's press conference Thal announced he planned to negotiate social plans and tariffs. He said that workers may strike to achieve these ends, i.e., strikes for more favourable redundancy payments instead of defending the factory.

Wednesday's rally gave a foretaste of the toothless protests the union now plans to organise. The workers were given whistles to blow and let off steam, and the protest was deliberately organised far away from the factory gates, in other words, to prevent workers from contemplating occupying a gate or even the plant and

actually going on strike. Instead they were told that after 2025 the production of a model would end and were then carted off to a demonstration and rally where once again Thal and another representative of IG Metall feigned their surprise and anger just as they had done prior to the factory meeting.

Workers must draw the lessons from the past few years and especially the last six months. If the workforce in Saarlouis allows the works councils and IG Metall to continue where they have now left off, it will lead to a disaster. The gradual closure of the plant will impact the entire region, leading to a rapid decline in wages and prospects. Workers have reported that when they apply for alternative jobs, they are offered very low wages, such as 12 euros an hour working in logistics. This is the future the works council is organising.

The workforce in Saarlouis should take an example from their Ford colleagues in India, whose factory is also to be closed. They are on strike and occupying the gates. In Saarlouis, too, an action and strike committee should be set up to prepare militant measures to defend the factory. To this end, contact must be made immediately with workers in India, Turkey, Romania and, above all, Spain.

Contact the Ford Action Committee: send a Whatsapp message to the following number: +491633378340



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