

Germany: Ford Saarlouis works council wants to use summer break for orderly wind-down of the plant

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27 July 2022

Today's factory meeting is the first since Ford officially announced the discontinuation of production at its Saarlouis plant, and the last before the summer break. The works council wants to use it to get the workforce in the mood for an orderly wind-down of the plant.

Ever since the closure decision, the works council and the IG Metall union have done everything in their power to prevent a serious fight to defend all jobs. Instead, they have organized pseudo-protests with white crosses, grim reapers and a symbolic Ford funeral.

Even the information meetings called by the IG Metall shop stewards and held in the departments, which lead to brief interruptions in production, are not about organizing a struggle against the plant closure. On the contrary, these antics compensate for the short-time working the works council has rejected and spread frustration. They are intended to consolidate the control of the union officials.

At the factory meeting, works council boss Markus Thal will deliver another of his familiar whining speeches, complaining that Ford management is refusing to make "clear announcements" and trying to "shirk its responsibility."

The latest works council leaflet says it was completely unclear whether Ford was seriously looking for a potential investor for the plant, how a possible sale would be structured, what Ford was planning, what the Saarland Social Democratic Party (SPD) state government was planning, "from when and to what extent a social plan would be necessary," and "much, much, more."

This was already the tenor of all the headlines after the SPD state government invited Ford's vice president for Europe, Kierad Cahill, to a meeting with the parliamentary economic committee last week. There, the top manager refused to make any further statements and only repeated the well known closure decision.

But in truth, Ford's plans are clear and well known. At least 4,000 jobs will be cut in Europe, most of them in

Saarlouis. Another 8,000 jobs will be destroyed in the US, as Ford announced last week. Under these circumstances, it is highly questionable whether the modern press shop and plastics production in Saarlouis will be preserved along with a few hundred jobs. According to Ford, this was "being examined."

Thal and the works council know this, and, as partners of management, are trying to push through a smooth and, as Thal emphasizes, "socially acceptable," reduction of jobs.

But in view of rampant inflation and mass layoffs at many other companies, the plant closure in the structurally weak Saarland automatically means a slide into permanent poverty for many workers. Here, "socially acceptable" only means that resistance to the plant closure and social unrest are to be suppressed.

For Thal and company, the plant closure is already a done deal. The works council is occupied intensively behind the backs of the workforce with plans for the period after closure. Thal made this clear in a long interview with the *Saarbrücker Zeitung* newspaper a few days ago. Asked how to help employees "who are now experiencing existential hardship" because they "can no longer pay the loan for their house, for example," Thal replied that he "also expects initiatives from the banks."

"Politics" must also take responsibility, he said. "Tailor-made training and qualification programs for Ford employees" would have to be worked out. In addition, everything had to be done "to place Ford employees in other Saar companies."

The demand for tailor-made training and qualification programs—a typical phrase of the employment agencies and the job centres—is linked by the works council and IG Metall to the perspective of the notorious "employment companies." These are usually run by ex-works council representatives or union bureaucrats and serve as a shunting yard into unemployment.

While the works council wants to use the summer break to

begin negotiating a “social plan” and organize an orderly wind-down of the plant, workers must use the plant vacation to organize a principled struggle to defend all jobs.

There is a very clear way to overcome the control of the widely hated works council and its mafia-like methods: building the Ford Action Committee to truly represent the interests of the workforce.

To do this, it is necessary to draw some lessons from the past months. Anyone who has followed the Action Committee’s leaflets and appeals knows that its assessments were correct from the start.

With the shutdown decision at the end of June, what the Action Committee had been warning about for half a year came to pass. A few days after the works council submitted its cutback proposals to Ford’s European headquarters in Cologne at the end of January, we wrote:

Concessions do not save jobs! All our concessions in the past and all the concessions already made at all Ford locations count for nothing today. We reject the blackmail and brutal competition being instigated between us and workers at other plants. Playing one off against the other leads to disaster.

Even then, the Action Committee demanded an immediate end to the secret negotiations and the disclosure of all concessions made in the fratricidal bidding war between Saarlouis and the Ford plant in Valencia, Spain.

Today it is absolutely clear that the defence of the Saarlouis plant and its jobs is only possible against the IG Metall and its works council representatives, not with them! Only the active intervention of workers themselves can prevent the liquidation of the plant, which has been built up by several generations of workers over more than 50 years.

This requires participation in the Action Committee and the preparation of real fighting measures: strikes, actions to prevent the dismantling and removal of machinery, sending delegations to other sites and companies.

The allies of Ford workers in Saarlouis are their brothers and sisters in Valencia, Cologne, Craiova, Turkey, the US and India. The workers in Valencia are paying for Ford’s promise to continue production there with massive wage cuts, job losses and the deterioration of their working conditions. All this was proposed by the Spanish works council representatives themselves.

The Ford workforces in Cologne, Romania and Turkey must also expect renewed attacks. The splitting of the company into combustion and electric vehicle divisions is linked to demands for a 10 percent profit margin!

The Action Committee has started to develop its international collaboration. Last weekend, the second online meeting of Ford workers from Saarlouis and Chennai in southern India took place. Indian Ford workers reported in detail about their struggle, where the company has two plants and announced in the spring that it would close both. One plant has been sold to Tata Motors and the other was supposed to close at the end of June.

But young Indian workers took the initiative and organized a very courageous struggle. They went on strike for five weeks and temporarily occupied the factory gates. But the unions did everything they could from the beginning to isolate and sabotage the strike. Then they strangled it in collaboration with the ruling party of Tamil Nadu. Now, Indian workers are beginning to organize independently to resist this sell-out.

All over the world, protests and struggles are increasing, mainly due to rapidly rising prices. And everywhere they are developing as a rebellion against the existing pro-capitalist unions.

The international meeting of the Ford Action Committee was also attended by Will Lehman, an auto worker from the US. He is running for president of the United Auto Workers union (UAW) as a rank-and-file worker against the corrupt leadership of the union. He emphasized that workers needed their own global strategy to prevail against the international corporations that pit workers against each other worldwide. This is why building rank-and-file Action Committees and networking them internationally is so critical.

The answer to the cowardly and reactionary policy of the works council and IG Metall, which completely subordinate themselves to the dictates of Ford corporate management, is the building of the Action Committee.

We therefore appeal to all Ford workers in Saarlouis who are ready to fight for their plant: At the upcoming works meeting, withdraw your mandate from the works council to speak on your behalf. It only speaks for itself, the union and the corporation, not for you. Elect your own independent representation that does not seek dialogue with management, but instead seeks to join forces with international colleagues in order to prepare joint actions and fighting measures.

Contact the Ford Action Committee via Whatsapp at +491633378340.



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