

Closure of Mercedes-Benz Ludwigsfelde

Rank-and-file action committees independent of IG Metall union needed to defend all jobs at all sites

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The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers at the Mercedes plant in Ludwigsfelde: Take the fight for your jobs into your own hands, place no trust in the IG Metall union and its representatives in the plant!

Establish a rank-and-file action committee!

- Instead of blackmail and division between the different workforces, act together at all sites to defend jobs, wages and social gains!

Spread this call via Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., as well as with flyers!

Starting in 2028, Mercedes-Benz plans to launch a new electric van. The new model is to be produced exclusively in Eastern Europe. The company is using the switch to electric mobility to launch a general attack on wages and jobs. Automotive companies operate internationally and play off workers at different locations against each other in search of the cheapest labour to maximize their profits. Mercedes-Benz is no exception.

Production in Ludwigsfelde is to be discontinued at the end of the decade. This threatens the loss of all 2,200 jobs here. Production of the chassis-cab versions of the Sprinter van is to be relocated from Ludwigsfelde to Düsseldorf, where the full-body models are already manufactured.

Mercedes' van business is already highly profitable. Finance daily *Handelsblatt* reported on September 9, 2022 that in the first half of the year, "the Stuttgart-based company achieved an operating return of 9.4 percent on sales of 7.8 billion euros and 190,000 vehicles sold."

None of this is benefiting the workers, who have produced the profit but will continue to be bled dry.

The Role of the Works Council and IG Metall—Accomplices of Management

As the representatives of IG Metall made clear at the factory meeting in September, the union is trying at all costs to prevent a joint struggle by workers at all sites. When they talk about "safeguarding locations," they mean rationalization measures and social cuts. When they talk about competitiveness, they mean job cuts. They consider plant closures to be unavoidable and play off employees at different plants against each other.

The fact that workers can only lose with such a strategy recently became clear at Ford, where IG Metall and the works council organized a bidding war between the plants in Saarlouis and Almussafes, Spain. Acting in the interests of the companies, the works council representatives in Germany and Spain submitted offers of sweeping wage cuts and concessions on working conditions. They competed to offer the company the most exploitative conditions.

In the end, the workers at both sites lost out. The plant in Saarlouis, which lost the bidding war, is to be closed by 2025 at the latest. But the plant in Almussafes is now also facing closure: Ford has withdrawn its previous announcement that it would manufacture electric vehicles there from 2025.

The first thing that any worker who seriously wants to fight must understand is the foul double game played by IG Metall and its local plant officials. While feigning concern at union meetings, they work closely with management, support its profit plans and play a key role in pushing through layoffs and plant closures. Defending jobs requires a separate path from that of the unions, one that places the interests of the workers higher than the profit interests of the company.

What Does the Necessary Independent Struggle Look Like?

It is necessary to create rank-and-file committees independent of the union officials at all sites, which will then take joint

action to defend jobs and wages. This is the only way to prevent management and the union from negotiating either shutdowns, massive job cuts or drastic regressions in conditions at one plant after another behind the backs of the workforce.

Central to this is focusing on the common interests of all workers at all sites, rather than bowing to corporate interests.

The rank-and-file committees advance a program of international workers' solidarity to oppose the orgy of enrichment of the corporate top management. This is the only way to prevent a handful of super-rich executives and shareholders from deciding the future and well-being of workers and their families.

International Perspective

You are not alone. Fellow workers in Düsseldorf—unlike the works council representatives there—do not see themselves as “winners” in the current reorganization of production. They have bled in the past and know that defeats at one location are defeats for all Mercedes-Benz employees. The same applies to colleagues at other locations such as Stuttgart, Sindelfingen, Rastatt and so on.

In Eastern Europe, too—in Hungary, Romania and Poland—workers have been bitterly squeezed and would welcome a hand extended to them in solidarity to improve their working conditions and wages.

But it is not only in Germany and Europe that you have allies. All over the world, resistance is growing against ever more brutal forms of exploitation, against mass layoffs, plant closures and social attacks. Just recently, Mercedes workers at the largest plant outside Germany, in São Paulo, Brazil, went on strike because 3,600 of 9,000 jobs are set to be eliminated.

Added to this are the consequences of the war against Russia in Ukraine. Never before has the danger of a third, nuclear world war been as great as it is today. The great powers—including Germany—are using the Ukraine war to massively increase armaments spending to secure their own imperialist interests. We workers are being made to pay for it.

This is the case in every country in the world. Workers everywhere face the same problems. They are suffering from rising energy costs, which are skyrocketing because of the sanctions against Russia, and from galloping inflation.

Protests and labour disputes are on the rise all over the world. In the process, workers are confronted not only with governments and corporations, but also with unions that want to stifle and hold down this wave of resistance. Increasingly, therefore, workers are deciding to organize independently in rank-and-file committees.

The defence of jobs, wages and social standards goes hand in hand with the struggle against the threat of war and also against

the policy of allowing COVID-19 to run wild, which is now threatening another surge of the disease in winter, with all its consequences.

The WSWS calls on Mercedes workers in Ludwigsfelde and all other locations to self-confidently take the fight for the defence of jobs into their own hands and refuse any longer to be dominated by IG Metall and the works council. Establishing a rank-and-file committee is the first step. The way forward is to join forces with fellow workers in Eastern Europe and also in the USA, Brazil, Mexico and the rest of the world.

The time could hardly be more opportune. Workers around the world are coming into conflict with the trade unions and forming independent rank-and-file committees.

We support you in building a rank-and-file committee in Ludwigsfelde and in networking with other rank-and-file committees worldwide. The point is to discuss in a circle of trustworthy colleagues what is necessary to defend all plants and jobs.

The first thing to do is to break through the division of workers fostered by the unions' pitting of each site against the others. A common struggle requires contacting workers from the other German Mercedes-Benz sites, as well as international sites such as in Hungary, Romania, Poland, Brazil, Mexico, etc., and linking up with workers from other plants, all of whom face similar conditions and similar tasks.

The WSWS supports the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), established to facilitate such international networking. Since its inception, this alliance has been gaining support worldwide.

In the US in particular, workers in the auto industry have formed strike and rank-and-file committees independent of the corrupt unions. There, socialist Will Lehman is running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union. He is winning enormous support with his demands for the abolition of the union bureaucracy, the return of power to the rank and file and for the international unity of the working class.

Workers must stand together! The rank-and-file committees build on the great tradition of workers struggles and confidently project workers strength onto the field of battle. Do not be intimidated! Managers and works council representatives do not build vehicles. You, the workers, create all the value. The shareholders, the managers, the union officials and the works council representatives are the beneficiaries of your work.

It is important to take action now. We say to workers at all sites: support, spread and share this call. Contact us via WhatsApp +491633378340.



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