

Vallourec, Germany: Build rank-and-file action committees to stop plant closures

Dietmar Gaisenkersting
17 October 2022

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on Vallourec workers in Mülheim and Düsseldorf not to accept the closure of their two plants without a fight. It is not too late. Everyone is still at their plant; production is running. The livelihoods of 2,400 workers, their families and many thousands more in the factories dependent on Vallourec can be successfully secured. However, this can only be achieved by rejecting the so-called “social contract” that the IG Metall union, the works council and the company’s top management have worked out.

To this end, a rank-and-file action committee independent of the trade union bureaucracy must be established to unite the workforces at both sites. As a first step, they must contact workers at the companies directly affected in the surrounding area, as well as all the workplaces and plants in which workers face the same problems: plant closures, job cuts and wage reductions.

How IG Metall and the works council are pushing through plant closures

In May, only two days after the French corporate management announced the closure of the two plants in Germany and following several protests and actions by the workforce, IG Metall and the works council came out with the demand for a “social contract.” In doing so, they have made it clear that they regard their task as implementing the company’s decision, not preventing it, because that is precisely the meaning of the “social contract.”

They have thus blocked any serious industrial action

before it could even begin. To push through the plant closures, they are dividing the workforce into young and old, temporary and permanent, agency workers and union contract employees, union members and the unorganized.

A few older, better paid workers with many years’ service will receive severance payments of up to six figures. Younger colleagues are to be fobbed off with payments that taxes and inflation will quickly consume. Temporary employees will be palmed off with a lump sum of €10,000, and trainees with as little as €5,000.

In view of the layoffs at many other corporations, the “transfer company,” into which younger employees (under 55) are supposed to go, offers nothing other than a transition into unemployment. Since the short-time allowance paid to those in the transfer company is only topped up to 85 percent of the usual monthly net wage, this means pay cuts and later, even lower unemployment benefits, since the latter are calculated on the basis of the short-time allowance.

The divisiveness of IG Metall is illustrated by the agreements that exclusively benefit union members. For example, these will receive different levels of severance bonuses depending on whether they were IG Metall members before the day of the closure announcement on May 18 or whether they joined afterwards, until September 1. In addition, IG Metall members are to benefit if Vallourec is able to sell off its two plant sites for a higher price than was estimated, and kept secret.

Meanwhile, all the parties have agreed on the timetable for winding down the plants. The first 500 employees are to leave as early as within the next six months and by the end of March, via “voluntary” severance packages. If IG Metall has its way, in less than 15 months, at the end of 2023 both of Vallourec’s

German plants and their current 2,400 jobs will no longer exist. Düsseldorf's more than 120-year tradition as a steel town will be irrevocably buried, for which IG Metall is responsible.

We can assume that the works council members will land on their feet. They are being paid to block any resistance from below and to deliberately push through the Vallourec closures.

Form an action committee

Do not allow yourselves to be sold out with offers of early retirement, severance pay and transfer companies. Think of the younger generations. Should they only be able to slave away as warehouse workers, parcel drivers and employees in the service industries at minimum wage? They want to start families, live with them carefree—and in peace.

Corporate shareholders can relocate production, close plants, destroy livelihoods when their personal profit is no longer enough for them. IG Metall and its works council representatives defend this principle tooth and nail. This cannot go on. It is not compatible with our interests; the interests of workers and shareholders can no longer be reconciled. The corporations, the governments and the unions have declared war on us workers.

Now is the time to fight back!

To do this, a joint rank-and-file action committee must be formed in both plants, in which trusted workers can collaborate to discuss and plan how to defend the plants unconditionally.

A first task will certainly be to establish contact with workers at immediately adjacent plants—for example from Salzgitter Mannesmann Grobblech or the plants that are also affected by the Vallourec closure, such as Hüttenwerke Krupp-Mannesmann in Duisburg. Vallourec plants and factories in France, Scotland and other countries that are falling victim to the company's restructuring are also the natural allies of the workforce in the Rhine and Ruhr. The company owns 50 production facilities in over 20 countries with a good 20,000 employees.

Like all large global corporations, Vallourec is

responding to the international economic crisis, the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the growing competition on the world market by cutting labour costs or relocating production to low-wage countries with the lowest social welfare standards.

In every country in the world, more and more workers are fighting back with strikes and protests in the face of dramatically rising prices, attacks on jobs and working conditions. Many of them, by forming rank-and-file action committees, have begun to take up the fight not only against the corporations but also against the union bureaucrats allied with them for implementing the announced corporate attacks.

The clearest expression of this resistance is the campaign of socialist Will Lehman in the United States. A young worker at Mack Trucks, Lehman is running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW), advocating the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the return of all power to the hands of the workers.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* formed the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) last year to enable the global networking of workers independent of union structures.

Join this worldwide movement of action committees: Ally with Ford workers in Saarlouis, steel and auto workers in the US and Mexico, railroad workers in the UK and US, plantation workers in Sri Lanka, transportation workers, teachers, old-age care staff and nurses around the world, etc.

Do not accept the closure and retrenchment plans of Vallourec and the union bureaucrats! Defend all jobs unconditionally!

Contact the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party)! The SGP supports the building of your independent action committee and will help to contact workers in other countries and other factories also affected by closures internationally. Send a WhatsApp message to the following number: +491633378340 or register using the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact