

Factory meeting at Ford Motors Saarlouis - What must be done to defend our jobs!

Ford Action Committee
15 December 2022

The following appeal was issued and distributed prior to the factory meeting held at Ford Motors in Saarlouis, Germany on December 14.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the last factory meeting of this year. In the course of the over 50 years existence of our factory, 2022 has been by far the most eventful and instructive. But based on a courageous drawing of the lessons of last year, 2023 will be the most important year yet. It will be the year workers at Ford in Saarlouis free themselves from the smothering grip of the IG Metall union and its works council and takes the defence of our livelihoods into our own hands.

The central lesson of the past year is clear: Our jobs cannot be defended by the IG Metall and its works council led by Markus Thal. If the struggle remains in their hands, it will lead to disaster.

As early as autumn 2021, it was evident that the Ford group was considering closing its plant here in Saarlouis. The last letter issued by the outgoing general works council chairman, Martin Hennig, announced a divisive bidding competition with Spanish Ford workers in Almussafes, Valencia, at the beginning of October 2021.

Thal supported and organised this disgraceful manoeuvre. On January 27, he and his Spanish counterpart, works council president José Luis Parra, handed over their respective bids to management. Both have worked together in the Ford European Works Council for years.

Thal and Parra claimed that there was no alternative to playing off our workforces against one another and worked out huge cuts in collaboration with their respective managements—without even informing us. Thal has still not told us what far-reaching cuts he plans to impose on us in Saarlouis and the other Ford workers in Cologne and Aachen.

Then, when the decision against Saarlouis was

announced, the union and works councils organised a pseudo-protest far away from the factory gates, thereby preventing any prospect of occupying the gates or even the whole factory in order to enforce our demand to keep our jobs. The mood among many of us subsequently hit a new low in June.

While Thal never tires of emphasising how cheated he feels, he continues to collaborate closely with the “cheaters” to finalise a “socially acceptable” agreement, i.e., for the liquidation of the plant. We are being told we should put our trust in Ford, the administration in the state of Saarland, IG Metall and the works council. Anyone who criticises Thal and his troops is to be silenced and opposition to his course meets with intimidation. This became particularly clear in this year's works council elections, the results of which recall the types of elections held in dictatorships.

At the last factory meeting in October, when Ford promised to retain a paltry 500 jobs, Thal announced that by the next meeting, i.e., today's, Ford's “compass for the first half of 2023 must point in the right direction.”

His own “compass” points in only one direction—in two and a half years Ford auto production in Saarlouis will end. He doesn't care what happens to us, our families and our livelihood. Thal will probably try to sell us so-called replacement jobs in order to finally seal the factory closure. In return Thal and his colleagues undoubtedly hope to be paid for their services with new posts, remuneration or both.

This year, however, has not only confirmed the treacherous role of the works council—it has also shown a way to fight back. In early January, a number of workers joined together to form the Ford Action Committee to take up the fight not only against the corporation, but also against its stooges in the works council and union.

In our first statement of January 29, 2022 we made clear: “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. On principle, 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.”

This warning has been fully borne out. Our Action Committee formulated the widespread opposition among workers in eight subsequent statements and appeals. From the very beginning we:

- rejected the bidding competition and proposed instead joint action with our colleagues in Almussafes,
- called for the withdrawal of the works council's mandate to speak and negotiate on our behalf,
- insisted that our jobs must not be sacrificed to satisfy the profit drive of the corporation and its shareholders, and we defended our interests over and above those of the capitalists,
- stressed that our factory can only be defended on the basis of an international struggle against the corporation.

We did this in full awareness that the attacks on us at Ford in Saarlouis are part of an international development. In the midst of our own struggle, Ford announced it planned to lay off 9,000 workers in the US, while in India, the Ford plant in Chennai was closed down.

The attacks on Ford's international workforce are in turn part of a general offensive by corporations around the worlds. Jobs are being wiped out, wages cut and working conditions tightened up in every sector—in the car industry, as well as in the chemical, steel and aerospace industries, among railway workers, in health and education sectors, etc. The attacks on the living conditions of workers all over the world have been intensified first by the coronavirus pandemic and now by the war in Ukraine.

In every country the trade unions line up with “their” corporations and governments. Here in Germany this has taken the form of the “Concerted Action,” where the various parties in the ruling coalition government—social democrats, Greens and the neoliberal FDP—work together with the big corporations and unions to enforce new attacks on us workers.

This universal experience of workers around the world testifies to the fact that there is no individual solution. We face problems we can only tackle and solve together. A handful of jobs retained at Ford, and other car companies and/or a new investment partner are no solution, but merely postpone the task we face: to unite internationally against the corporations and subordinate their interests to ours.

Those of us in the Action Committee have not only talked about international unification, we have also initiated it. Colleagues from Saarlouis spoke in July with Ford colleagues from India who had been on strike for weeks in defence of their factory - against the will of their unions.

At the same meeting we also spoke with Will Lehman, the auto worker from Mack Trucks in the US who has courageously taken up the fight against the union bureaucracy of the UAW (United Auto Workers). He ran for election as UAW president on a platform of abolishing the hated bureaucracy and handing over all power to workers on the shop floor.

In our last statement we explained the importance of his struggle. At our meeting in July, he stressed: “It’s not enough to be angry; it’s necessary to fight. I can’t do it for you; you have to do it yourselves!” On this basis, he is calling for action committees to be established in the US and internationally to organise the necessary struggle. Despite all the efforts of the UAW bureaucracy to silence him, he received 5,000 votes in the election.

The record of the Ford Action Committee is also positive. We don't have to retract a single sentence we addressed to the workforce. All of our assessments and warnings have been confirmed. We cannot, however, rest on our laurels. There is still much to do.

So once again, we call upon you to join the action committee. If we want to defend our jobs, we have to organise, nobody else will do it for us.

The conditions for conducting an international struggle are more favourable than ever. Increasingly broad sections of the working class are conducting worldwide protests and struggles against war, inflation, sackings and the speed up at work. These struggles must be united and coordinated to succeed. The trade unions are trying to prevent exactly that by seeking to confine us within national borders.

We are taking a stand against this!

Get in touch via Whatsapp message at: +491633378340 or fill out the form. This is the only way to make 2023 the most important year in the more than half a century existence of our factory.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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