

Ford slashes another 3,800 jobs across Europe, including 2,300 in Germany

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Behind the backs of the workforce, the general works council and management at Ford have agreed to cut 3,800 jobs across Europe over the next three years. This affects about 11 percent of the current workforce of 34,000 in Europe. In Germany, 2,300 jobs are to be cut, 1,300 in Great Britain and another 200 in other, unspecified countries.

The agreement came as a surprise to the workforce in Cologne, when the chairman of the general works council for Ford in Germany, Benjamin Gruschka, informed them of the cuts at three factory meetings on Tuesday. Just three weeks ago, Gruschka had talked about taking action against job cuts with an "escalation plan at four different locations."

Now Gruschka describes the wiping out of 2,300 jobs a "success" because in January there was talk about 3,200 jobs being lost.

When the Cologne works council, which Gruschka also chairs, gave the go-ahead for about 500 Ford shop stewards to protest loudly at the end of January, the WSWS wrote at the time that such theatrics had only one aim: "It is to prepare the talks between the Cologne works council led by Benjamin Gruschka and Ford management at which the job cuts will be settled."

In response to the statement by Katharina von Hebel, chairperson of the European Ford works council, that the management at Ford was seeking to "take a constructive path" in talks with the works council, the WSWS wrote: "The Cologne workforce should be warned. The 'constructive path' of the works council and IG Metall was to silently cut jobs."

This has now been confirmed. The procedure is familiar, and not only at Ford. First, the company announces massive job cuts, then IG Metall and its works councils rant about an impending "struggle" and have a few shop stewards march out blowing whistles, followed finally by a somewhat smaller job cut touted as a

"success" a little later. The renunciation of compulsory redundancies by the company is praised by the union as a "negotiation success" and, in the end, the company cuts exactly as many jobs as it had planned from the beginning.

Gruschka claimed last month that at least 2,500 jobs would be cut in product development at the Cologne-Merkenich and Aachen sites and another 700 in administration. Only Gruschka himself and his closest confidants know how real these figures were. Ford did not comment on these figures.

Now Gruschka is interpreting the 1,700 jobs in development and the 600 in administration lost as a "negotiating success."

"After all, we have now been able to secure 900 good, qualified jobs and important skills for the future of our product development, jobs which would have been eliminated in the company's original plans," Gruschka claims.

Together with the cutbacks in Great Britain, where 1,300 of the total 6,500 workforce will lose their jobs, 1,000 of them in product development, this means Ford will shed about 40 percent of its previous capacity in Europe. This is "roughly in line with chief executive Jim Farley's predictions," wrote the *Financial Times*, "that the group will need 40 percent fewer staff to develop battery models." Ford plans to phase out production of internal combustion vehicles and sell only electric cars in Europe from 2030 onwards.

This conspiratorial game between the company, IG Metall and the works council has been played for many years in order to push through mass redundancies. The works council ensures this takes place without compulsory redundancies, i.e., via "voluntary" severance programmes and part-time work for older workers.

This is the type of "social partnership" that the union favours. It wants to be involved in designing the job cuts

in such a way as to avoid a revolt by the workforce. When Gruschka now declares, “The workforce knows that fewer workers are needed with the new electric models,” he is in fact talking only about himself and his IGM and works council colleagues.

The Ford plant in Saarlouis with 4,600 workers is currently being wound up in a similar manner. The IG Metall works council there, led by Markus Thal, claims that the decision on the plant closure was made by Ford. The union’s “struggle” boils down to accompanying the Saarland state government in the search for an investor who will take over the entire plant.

However, it does not seem possible to find such a partner. Recently, negotiations with the Chinese company BYD (Build Your Dreams) failed. One can be sure that the head of the works council, Thal, will do everything he can to close the plant “without compulsory redundancies”—as regulated by “social partnership”—by 2025.

In 2019, 25,000 jobs were destroyed in this way in Ford’s international workforce, including 12,000 in Europe and almost half of those in Germany. At that time, plants in Russia, France, Wales and Brazil were also closed down. In the meantime, further plants in Brazil (2021) and India (2022) have been closed. Last summer, Ford also cut around 3,000 jobs in vehicle development in the US, Canada and India.

The company, trade unions and works councils constantly claim that the never-ending cuts will increase competitiveness and that the remaining jobs will be safe. Once again, Ford Germany boss Martin Sander has justified the job cuts with this argument. If Ford in Germany is positioned to be competitive in future, this will also help to secure jobs, he claimed.

Since all auto companies and the IG Metall have this attitude, the next round of cutbacks is only a matter of time. The remaining Ford sites and plants are therefore far from secure. The site in Dunton, UK, where most of the cuts in the UK will be made, is responsible for the development of Transit vans, which will be available with hybrid drive by the middle of the next decade and are to be built in Romania and Turkey.

Even the European plants where Ford wants to produce electric vehicles are not safe from constant downsizing. Gruschka had already announced last month that pressure was also high to cut costs in production. Production jobs are also being cut in Cologne, where Ford is building the Fiesta model until June and then wants to produce two electric vehicles with new investment of €2 billion.

The same applies to the plant in Halewood (Liverpool), in which the group is investing £380 million (around €430 million) to produce electric components for battery vehicles, as well as the Spanish plant in Almussafes (Valencia), which won a bidding competition against the plant in Saarlouis and is expected to produce e-models from 2024.

This brief inventory alone shows that defending jobs cannot be done in one country or even in one plant. The corporation operates internationally, and so must the workforce. The main obstacles to a European-wide and international defence of jobs are the trade unions and their works councils, who are responsible for putting all of management’s plans for cuts into practice.

Workers are played off against one another from site to site and from country to country by the nationalist trade union policy of class collaboration. What is needed is an international strategy operating independently of the trade unions. That is why the building of action committees like the one at Ford in Saarlouis and their international networking is so crucial.

Such action committees, democratically controlled by the workers and off limits to the works councils and trade union officials must organise the common struggle of all Ford locations against plant closures and job cuts. They must unite with workers internationally who are resisting exploitation and the effects of the pandemic, war in Ukraine and rising inflation.

Time is of the essence. Corporate strategists are already working on the next round of job cuts. All Ford workers must prepare for this. So get in touch with the Ford Action Committee and discuss joint action to defend jobs and wages.

Contact us and send a Whatsapp message to the following number: +491633378340



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