

Ford Saarlouis, Germany: Down tools until we know what's planned! Stop the sellout! Prepare combative measures!

Ford Action Committee Saarlouis
12 July 2023

Dear colleagues,

The factory meeting at Ford Motor Company's plant in Saarlouis, Germany, one week ago was such an obvious fraud that only one conclusion can be drawn: We must withdraw the mandate from the IG Metall union and the works council led by Markus Thal and take up the fight for our interests ourselves. If we do not take action now, we will pay a heavy price!

We are being lied to and shamelessly cheated. For more than a year we have been left in the dark about what will happen to us when production of the Focus model comes to an end. This has to stop right now!

We demand:

- No work without clarity about the future. For the immediate initiation of a strike ballot together with preparation for a strike and occupation of the factory!

- An end to the cover-up by disclosing the identity of the alleged interested investor company. Its workers are our allies.

- The full, permanent employment of all 3,850 remaining workers at the current collective bargaining conditions of the metal and electrical industry in North Rhine-Westphalia up to 2032 and beyond, not just 2,500 workers or possibly even 1,000. No transfer to other companies!

The works council and IG Metall want to prevent industrial action at all costs. This is the meaning of the ridiculous graphic "Scenarios for Ford Saarlouis" which has been circulating in the factory for a few days.

In the style of a children's book, IG Metall praises the so-called "investor process" as option 1 and vehemently rejects option 2, "industrial action." The graphic could just as well have come from the office of Ford Managing Director Martin Sander, who has repeatedly warned against unrest in the factory and industrial action on the grounds it would scare off potential investors.

The fact that the IGM and the works council are now openly opposing industrial action adds a new dimension to the sellout. Until now, Thal & Co. combined their groveling to company managers with the announcement that if management did not present a "viable perspective for the future ... industrial action would be unavoidable."

Of course, this has always been a lie—just like the claim that concessions and social cuts would secure jobs. The opposite is the case. In 2018 there were 7,000 employees, now we are down to 4,500, and—very likely following the investment process—in two years we will be 2,500, if that.

Thal bragged threateningly in the past that if there was no future perspective for us, Ford would be confronted with "the most expensive plant closure in history." In fact Thal, Michel and his cronies in the works council, along with Degranges and Köhlinger from IG Metall, are working to guarantee Ford the cheapest plant closure in history.

What they have in mind is clear. They want to keep us in the dark as long as possible and play us off against each other, stoking fears while gradually shutting down the plant. One only has to recall the liquidation of Neue Halberg Guss (NHG), where years of stalling tactics by IG Metall ultimately led to the closure of the plant. In March 2020, the last remaining 1,000 steelworkers were laid off—with no money left for severance pay.

A former temporary worker at the Ford plant in Wülfrath also warned us: "Our works council used the same tactics. They sold us out." The Wülfrath plant was sold off on several occasions beginning in 2000. Finally, Knorr-Bremse ended up with what was left of the factory. "We were temporary workers and later fixed-term employees," the former colleague reported. "On 11 occasions our employment contracts were extended. When the plant finally closed we didn't get a cent."

The investment process is the road to gradual closure

At the works meeting, a pompous PowerPoint presentation was meant to disguise the many unanswered questions:

The "letter of intent" allegedly signed by an interested party is absolutely non-binding. Every condition can be withdrawn without consequences for the signatories. That this is the case is confirmed by the mystery surrounding the ominous investor. If

there is a letter of intent, what does it say?

The state government and Ford have promised the investor money to invest at the Saarlouis site. According to Thal, the investor plans to inspect the factory sometime before September and take it over by the end of the year. Will he also take over the production facilities or just the site? What are we, i.e., those left at the end of the process, to produce? Will it still have anything to do with the car industry?

The 1,000 jobs promised by Ford are offset against the much acclaimed total of 2,500 jobs to be retained. Currently we are a workforce of about 4,500. This year 650 are leaving via severance payments, and 80 have signed contracts for partial retirement (this figure was missing in the presentation). That leaves about 3,850 colleagues, of whom only 2,500, if any, will transfer to the new company after June 30, 2025.

What happens to the 1,350 colleagues who go home empty-handed? The presentation only referred to "further plans." It declared that the works council has concluded a company agreement for these colleagues, but what exactly was agreed? The head of the IGM district, Köhlinger, told the press that "severance pay, qualification measures and possibly the establishment of a transfer company" were being discussed.

It is said that the investor "intends" to pay the wage scales agreed by IGM. For the 1,000 workers covered by the company agreement with Ford, this is the IGM wage scale for North Rhine-Westphalia, which currently applies to all of us. But what about the other 1,500 colleagues? Will they also receive the NRW wage or perhaps the Saarland IGM wage? Because that means about 5 percent less pay for long-serving workers. Who among us will receive the conditions promised by Ford? And who will be hired on the investor's conditions?

IG Metall is deliberately organising this division to keep us quiet and leave us at the mercy of the new investor. This is central to the union's strategy to suppress any industrial action.

Two reasons play an important role in the strategy of the union and works council apparatus of functionaries, a strategy to prevent a struggle to defend the factory and all jobs.

The first is the development of war and the insane military build-up whose costs are being imposed on the working class through austerity measures and social cuts. The trade unions support this war policy and try to suppress any labour struggle because they fear that it could quickly be linked to a struggle against war and militarism.

The second reason is our proximity to France. Some of us live and have family in the neighbouring country where strikes and street battles prevail. We are all closely following the struggles taking place against the hated Macron government and its brutal pension cuts, which have been going on for months. Our sympathies are with the French workers, and we believe the time has come for us to fight together.

This is exactly what IG Metall and its Thal works council want to prevent. They fear that a strike at our Ford plant will coincide with the strikes in France and become the trigger for a

broad strike movement throughout Europe and internationally. There is growing resistance everywhere. In Britain, a wave of strikes by postal, rail, public service, education and health workers has been going on for months. In Spain, workers in many sectors are striking on the eve of new elections. In Portugal and Italy, but also in the Czech Republic and Romania, strikes against mass dismissals and government austerity measures are increasing.

We have also shown that we want to fight and there have been repeated protests and work stoppages since the last factory meeting. Last Wednesday, when a ballot was cancelled, the final assembly crew went over to the body shop to confront the factory's leading shop stewards. They were unavailable, however, and it was left to junior shop stewards to appease the angry workers.

It is now time to fight: against Ford, against IG Metall and against their works council!

That is why we demand, in addition to what we have already mentioned above:

Reject all attempts to split the workforce! Send delegations of trustworthy colleagues to prepare a joint action with our colleagues in Cologne, where production of the Fiesta model is being stopped and one wave of cost cuts follows the other.

Such a delegation of trustworthy colleagues should also go to Valencia in Spain, where almost 1,200 jobs are being cut and wages are being reduced, and where the works council under José Luis Parra of the UGT is brutally attacking the internal opposition.

In addition, the delegation should visit our colleagues in the industrial park, who are to be dismissed with meagre severance pay and who, like us, are being held back by the union.

Contact us and help build the Ford Action Committee. Contact us via WhatsApp at the number +491633378340 or fill out our contact form below.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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