

Ford Saarlouis: IG Metall and works council put the final seal on plant closure

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At a works meeting on February 7, the German engineering union, IG Metall and the works council at Ford Motors in Saarlouis announced a document for a social contract aimed at sealing the end of the plant. Of the almost 7,000 jobs that once existed at the factory, only 1,000 are to remain at the end of next year. This means that 2,800 of the current workforce of around 3,800 will lose their jobs by that date, in addition to around 1,500 jobs lost in the neighbouring supplier park.

This confirms what the Ford Action Committee has always said. Jobs cannot be defended with the works council and IG Metall, but only in opposition to them. From the very beginning, the works council and IG Metall have worked intensely with the company management, in what can only be described as a conspiracy against the workforce. Their main aim throughout, and even now, has been to keep production running as smoothly as possible while organising the closure of the plant and the destruction of jobs in secret negotiations.

Markus Thal, head of the works council, claimed that the plant and the jobs could be defended by workers making voluntary and far-reaching concessions on wages and working conditions. He also maintained that negotiations had to be conducted in secret in order to be successful and that an investor had been found whose name could not be made public in order not to jeopardise a possible takeover. All of these claims have proved to be lies and deception.

Now Thal & Co are trying to talk up severance payments and quote high sums which, when calculated accurately and after deduction of taxes, shrink like snow in the sun. The claim that a severance payment is a replacement for a job is the next big lie told by the works council mafia. Severance pay has never and

nowhere prevented massive job losses. It has invariably been the path to social devastation and the ruination of future of generations.

There is no individual way out of the crisis. A common struggle in defence of all jobs is necessary and can no longer be postponed. That is why the establishment of the independent action committee is so important.

The redundancies and plant closure plans at Ford are just the beginning. A job massacre is unfolding in the auto industry the likes of which the sector has not seen since the Second World War. For some time now, manufacturers and suppliers have been using the transfer to electric mobility to cut jobs and increase labour exploitation.

At the end of December, the Munich-based Ifo Institute once again reported falling business expectations in the auto industry based on a company survey. Shareholders are now unequivocally demanding a huge increase in the exploitation of the around 800,000 workers employed by manufacturers and suppliers in order to ensure ever rising returns on their investments.

When it comes to jobs, social security, working conditions and wages, nothing is safe. Studies estimate that up to 40 percent of jobs will be lost as a result of the switch to electric mobility, i.e., over 300,000 in Germany. The situation in other countries is very similar.

This means that major class struggles are inevitable, which will go far beyond the current warning strikes and break through the control of the trade union apparatus. There will be spontaneous strikes, factory occupations and mass protests of all kinds. This is why IG Metall and its works councils are doing everything they can to suppress any initiative in defence of the

Ford plant in Saarlouis. They are afraid that Ford-Saarlouis will spark a conflagration and that the heated mood and anger over mass redundancies and social cuts will turn into active resistance.

The conclusion is clear: it is necessary to courageously oppose the conspiracy of the management board, works council and IG Metall to shut down the plant. Millions of workers in many other companies are waiting for someone to make a start.

Thal and his cronies are threatening that anyone who fights the closure will lose their right to severance pay. Just as two years ago, when he agreed to the disgraceful bidding contest and played off the employees in Saarlouis against their colleagues in Almussafes, Spain, the works council is now once again trying to divide the workforce with the help of the social plan.

Nobody should be intimidated by this. The social plan does not suspend the right to strike and industrial action. The announcement of the plant closure also ended the phase of so-called industrial peace. There is no reason to continue production under these conditions and be led like lambs to the slaughter.

It is now necessary to build the action committee and prepare joint struggle measures. Two things are key to this end: building links with workers at other Ford plants and suppliers and taking stock of the reactionary divisive policy of the works council and IG Metall.

The last two years, which have been especially bitter for colleagues at Ford in Saarlouis, have taught us important lessons. After the initial shock that followed the announcement of the plant's closure in June 2022, the works council under Thal spread the illusion that things could somehow continue.

One year earlier he had already played off the employees in Saarlouis against those in Almussafes in Spain in a brutal bidding war. Thal negotiated behind closed doors for months. To this day, he refuses to disclose the wage concessions and extensive deterioration in working conditions he offered at the time.

This was followed by stalling tactics with a supposed investor who would take over the plant. In October 2023, it became clear that there was no investor. The plant was to be closed. Nevertheless, rumours were fuelled that an investor would or had already been found. In order to absorb the expected anger and disappointment, the works council and IG Metall

organised short warning strikes from January 17 to 19. The reason given by Thal was that Ford management was refusing to increase severance payments beyond those stipulated in existing contracts. He later announced that the social plan that was now on the table was the result of the workforce's struggle.

In reality, the last warning strike spectacle by the IGM and the works council was aimed solely at concealing the fact that the social contract agreed serves exclusively to enforce the plant closure and maintain production up until the last day. What has now been decided, the extension of production until the end of November 2025, was already apparent last month.

IGM and the works council are now urging the workforce to accept the "overall packet" in a ballot on February 22. This would be the final nail in the coffin Thal is hammering into the plant and means that car production in Saarlouis will be history by the end of 2025.

The WSWs and the Ford Action Committee have been fighting against the bankrupt policy of IG Metall and its works councils from the very beginning.

We therefore call on the workforce to act now:

- Reject Thal and his social contract!
- Refuse the salami tactics of implementing job cuts with a voluntary redundancy programme and job "transfer company"!
- Halt production while still possible!
- Make your fight the starting point to oppose the mass destruction of jobs throughout the auto industry!
- Contact your colleagues at ZF, Bosch, Mahle, Continental and also autoworkers at VW, Opel, Mercedes and BMW, who are all facing similar attacks!
- Join forces with Ford colleagues in Valencia, Cologne, Craiova, Istanbul and the US!
- Build the Ford Saarlouis action committee! Contact us either by WhatsApp message to the following number: +491633378340 or via the form below!



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact