

Social collective agreements prepare way for closure of Ford Saarlouis parts supplier park

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On Monday, March 18, IG Metall union officials and works council members at the Ford Saarlouis industrial park organised another decisive step towards the closure of the manufacturing site in western Germany. They blackmailed the workforce of the supplier companies into agreeing to so-called social collective agreements.

Markus Thal, Chairman of the Works Council at Ford, and IG Metall Völklingen set the course for this in February. With the acceptance of the “social” collective agreement for the Ford plant in Saarlouis, it was clear that the approximately 1,800 employees of the 11 plants in the Ford Industrial Supplier Park, or I-Park for short, no longer had a future. In the end, workers at Benteler, Tenneco, Magna, Lear and Rhenus were compelled to agree to the sell-off by a large majority. At AIS, the social collective agreement had already been agreed two weeks earlier.

To justify its decision, IG Metall writes: “Those affected have recognised that the companies were not willing to relocate jobs and replacement products to Saarlouis.” That is nonsense. Those affected have known for at least two years that the Ford corporation and its suppliers were determined to shut down the entire plant in Saarlouis. But the IG Metall and its works council reps have repeatedly stalled them with false promises in order to prevent industrial action against the cuts.

Ford has been in the process of closing or reorganising entire plants in Europe, the US, Brazil, Russia and India for four years in order to increase profits at the expense of the workforce. However, works council representatives and the IG Metall have done everything in their power for years to ensure that resistance to this has come to nothing.

Almost two years ago, in October 2022, the rank-and-file Ford Action Committee warned: “The declared aim of the works council and IG Metall is for a ‘social collective agreement’ to force the regulated closure of the plant on us.” This has been fully confirmed. The union has been

using attrition tactics for years, culminating in the last six-day “industrial action” at the supplier park.

The strike has shown that workers do not lack willingness to fight. In the first week of March, IG Metall members voted overwhelmingly in favour of an indefinite strike in a ballot at all plants. When this began on March 8, it was supported practically 100 percent of the time. For several days, rallies, demonstrations, a motorcade and several meetings were held in the largest I-Park hall.

The strike had an immediate impact on production of the Focus model, which is scheduled to continue at the Ford plant until November 2025. The suppliers produce gearboxes, axles, body parts, interior fittings and dashboards for this model. As a result of the strike at I-Park, production at the main Ford plant came to a standstill for six days.

But IG Metall did not take industrial action in defence of jobs; it was solely concerned with pushing through severance payments and determining the specifics of the decided closure. That is why it did not call on workers at the Ford plant to join in and extend the struggle, it had already urged them to accept a social collective agreement.

“As they already don’t want to give us any jobs or a future,” wrote IG Metall chief negotiator Ralf Cavelius and Uwe Zabel from the union’s central district, “the only option left here is the second-best solution of a social collective agreement.” They once again emphasised the union’s compliant stance: “If the companies don’t want it, there’s nothing we can do.” They reduce the workforce to supplicants dependent on the mercy of the corporations.

The IG Metall works council members at Ford Saarlouis, led by Markus Thal, personify this submissive attitude. They are not willing to fight for jobs but support the company in its attacks on the workforce. First, they supported the internecine bidding competition between the Ford plants in Saarlouis and Almussafes in Spain.

Then they suppressed resistance out of supposed consideration for an alleged investor that would emerge. To this day, the workforce does not know what secret agreements they made with the plant management.

The union brought in Uwe Zabel from the Frankfurt IG Metall headquarters specifically to suppress resistance in the supplier park. Zabel has a long, “militant” history in the union. After holding several positions in northern Germany, he is now IG Metall secretary in the “Joint Development Project Network Future,” with which the union aims to gain new members in companies without collective bargaining agreements.

Zabel is a master at “looking left and turning right.” In Saarlouis, he organised non-stop protests and strike meetings during the six days of industrial action and delivered incendiary speeches against Ford—only to ultimately work alongside plant management and the works council to ensure that workers agreed to the social collective agreements.

These agreements provide for severance payments of 1.5 gross monthly salaries per year of employment for permanent employees, as well as 12 months of continued employment in a so-called “transfer company” (really just an onward transmission mechanism to the unemployment lines), two years for those over 58. This means that workers with years of seniority can expect severance payments of around €100,000. At the Ford plant itself, the figure is €150,000 to €200,000. But what will happen to the temporary and agency workers? What about the many people indirectly affected in the region?

In addition, even the best severance payments cannot compensate for the loss of a permanent job. With the acceptance of the social collective agreements, only one thing is certain: the lights will go out at Ford production in Saarlouis at the end of November 2025, and what will happen to the 1,000 employees who are supposed to continue working until 2032 at the latest is written in the stars. In the crisis-ridden Saarland, almost 7,000 jobs will be destroyed within 10 years (from 2022 to 2032 at the latest) in the state capital Saarlouis alone.

The Ford Action Committee is therefore calling on workers in Saarlouis to join forces with their brothers and sisters in other threatened plants to take up the fight themselves, independently of the IG Metall. As early as 2022, it wrote: “Ford will not be able to close a single plant if we unite internationally and lead the fight together.”

During the vote at the Ford plant four weeks ago, on February 22, the action committee called on workers to

vote against the social collective agreement and the plant closure, to express no confidence in the works council and IG Metall and to take the fight for jobs into their own hands:

A joint fight in defence of all jobs is necessary and must no longer be postponed. The claim that severance pay is a substitute for a job is false. Severance pay has never prevented a jobs massacre (...) It has always been the path to social devastation and the destruction of the future of the next generation.

This is truer than ever. An unparalleled jobs massacre is unfolding throughout the automotive and supplier industry. The causes are not just the switch to EVs, the introduction of artificial intelligence or international competition. The ruthless attack on all the gains of the working class has a deeper reason: it is part of a class war that goes hand in hand with the return to war and militarism in foreign policy.

In this situation, the struggle for jobs can no longer be left to IG Metall and the works council reps, which act as Ford’s executive organs and company police. The Ford Action Committee insists that every job must be defended unconditionally. It fights for the international unity of the working class to defend jobs, wages and social gains. The social interests of workers must take precedence over the profit interests of the capitalists!

We say: Draw the lessons from the Ford-Saarlouis experience and join the Ford Action Committee! All contacts will be treated confidentially. Send a WhatsApp message to +491633378340 and fill in the following form.



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