

Attacks on jobs and social benefits at Opel, Germany part of global job cuts by Stellantis

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The International Workers Alliance of the Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is organising a meeting on Sunday, August 25 at 9 p.m. CET, “For global action to defend jobs at Warren Truck and around the world!” Click here to register.

In addition to cuts in Italy and the United States, Stellantis is also attacking jobs and collectively agreed social benefits at its European Opel plants. Works council representatives and IG Metall union officials have so far blocked any independent struggle by the workforce.

In the USA, Stellantis has announced 2,450 layoffs at Warren Truck Assembly Plant near Detroit. At Fiat in Italy, 12,000 redundancies have also been announced, which will result in the loss of a further 13,000 jobs in the supply industry. In Aspern, near Vienna, an Opel plant that once employed almost 2,000 people has just been closed.

Opel plants in Germany are also feeling the effects of the Stellantis management’s merciless austerity programme. In Eisenach, at the former Wartburg plant, workers alternate between periods of exhausting overwork and short shifts, during which their incomes fall sharply. In Kaiserslautern, a planned battery cell factory will not be built for now because the demand for electric cars is allegedly too low.

At Opel’s main plant in Rüsselsheim, the workforce has been cut from over 40,000 to less than 9,000, and further jobs in production and engineering are at risk. This year, another 1,000 jobs are to be cut. The International Technical Development Centre (ITEZ) in Rüsselsheim is also continuing to shrink, after a large part of it was sold to the French service provider Segula. The CAD technology department with 100 employees is currently being closed.

The Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network has declared the assembly plant in Warren to be a “decisive battleground in the global war for jobs.” It is

calling on all autoworkers worldwide to unite in defense of jobs. Because in globalised production, autoworkers’ allies are not the union leaders and national management, but their fellow autoworkers all over the world!

On 20 August, a team from the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed the call to “Stop the mass layoffs at Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant!” during the shift change at Opel in Rüsselsheim and spoke to numerous production workers.

Almost all the workers who stopped to talk to the WSWs team about their American colleagues confirmed that the mood in the plant was “tense” or “bad.” They also said they often had to work on Saturdays. Of the 2,500 or so workers who build the Astra model here, around 40 percent are temporary workers who can be dismissed at any time.

“It’s always going downhill,” said a worker with over 15 years at the plant, “that’s what I’ve been experiencing here lately. We’re building the Astra now, but production is increasingly being shifted to temporary workers. We’re not getting enough information from the works council,” he continued. It seemed that “the works council reps are looking after themselves first.”

This was confirmed by many other workers we spoke to. “The works council members don’t tell us anything, even though they know a lot,” said an older worker with 34 years on the Opel assembly line. “They dance to the tune of the bosses who pay them.”

These statements touch on a key issue: the union officials, who style themselves as “employee representatives,” are active partners of management in implementing the company’s plans at the plant. For years, the IG Metall has worked to block resistance.

It helped organise the closure of the Opel plants in Bochum and Antwerp years ago. In 2017, it played an indispensable role in the takeover by the Peugeot group PSA, as well as in 2021 in the major merger with Fiat-

Chrysler, which resulted in the formation of Stellantis. With its network of works council reps and shop stewards and its ever-new “future collective agreements,” IG Metall has helped to nip resistance in the bud.

The head of the Opel works council in Rüsselsheim, Wolfgang Schäfer-Klug, who also heads the European works council, is paid handsomely for this (although exact figures are not published). He has been working closely with Stellantis head Carlos Tavares for seven years. As the group has its headquarters in the Netherlands and is not subject to German rules, there are no IG Metall union leaders on the company’s board as “employee representatives.”

When the Stellantis group was founded over three years ago, Tavares and Schäfer-Klug promised that any restructuring would take place “without plant closures and without compulsory redundancies.” Since then, 23,000 of the company’s 281,000 workers worldwide have already been cut. According to official figures, the global corporation still has around 258,000 employees today.

In the same period, so-called “value creation” has increased sharply, and last year Stellantis reported a record profit of €18 billion. While sales per employee in 2021 were still €530,000, this figure rose to €730,000 in 2023.

CEO Carlos Tavares personally pockets incredible sums. For 2022, his compensation was set at around €23.5 million, a significant increase over the previous year, when he pocketed €19.2 million. According to a French report, his compensation for 2023 even climbed to €36.5 million!

John Elkann, the Agnelli heir (Fiat) and current chairman of the supervisory board, and other capitalists such as Robert Peugeot, but also a certain Jacques de Saint-Exupéry, a long-standing member of PSA management who holds the position of “employee representative” on the supervisory board, also receive gigantic salaries.

The call from the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network is: “A line in the sand must be drawn!” Because the right of employees to work and receive an adequate standard of living must take precedence over the profits of managers and shareholders. Several Opel workers in Rüsselsheim especially agreed with this when they talked about the fate of the many temporary workers.

“It doesn’t look good,” said Dolan. “The temporary workers who were taken on last year are now probably back to square one.” He himself was a temporary worker

at the plant for 17 months before being taken on in July 2023—but only with an 18-month contract. Production workers are currently being laid off again.

Last year, IG Metall painted a rosy picture of the hiring in of temporary workers at full-time positions, and had boasted about it. However, only 50 temporary workers were taken on permanently last year. Another 100, like Dolan, were fobbed off with temporary contracts, to which another 125 were added in the spring. Since then, 300 temporary workers are to be dismissed again.

“If I don’t get a permanent contract in the next two months, I’ll have to register as unemployed and I’ll be back on the street by the end of January,” said Dolan. “It’s terrible, terrible.” He described the mental pressure and tension of all those involved, especially the young workers who have families with children. Opel is creating an atmosphere of uncertainty throughout the plant.

Jamal, another Opel worker, who has been with the company for 35 years, said that his wages were now lower than when he started working there. “Today it’s not even certain whether the site will remain here,” he said. Jamal agreed that this was also the balance sheet of the IG Metall, which has played an important role here for years. He said: “You are right that the workers have to organise themselves independently and internationally.”

All Opel workers and other car workers are invited to participate in the online meeting of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC)! Register and join the meeting on Sunday, August 25 at 9 p.m. CET: “For global action to defend jobs at Warren Truck and around the world!” Click here to register.

And register on the form below to help build an independent rank-and-file action committee!



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