

Audi workers in Brussels strike against jobs massacre across the VW group

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On Wednesday, after the summer break, workers at the Audi plant in Vorst near Brussels downed tools. Around 100 of the 3,000 employed at the plant entered the workplace for the first time early Wednesday morning but refused to resume work. The afternoon shift did not go to work either. Images from the Flemish public broadcaster VRT show how workers from Audi and supplier companies have set up tents and protest camps on the factory premises.

“We don’t want to start again until we have more information,” Franky De Schrijver of the FGTB trade union told the media. The stoppage will halt operations and potentially keep the plant closed for the next few days. As the *Brussels Times* reported, Audi had planned for employees in the paint shop to resume work on Thursday and for all 3,000 to return to work on Friday.

On Tuesday, management confirmed at a staff meeting that neither Audi itself nor any other Volkswagen Group brand would be commissioning the assembly of a new model there.

As reported by VRT, the site in the southwest of Brussels is to be abandoned in the foreseeable future “due to a lack of demand for the Q8 e-tron SUV produced there, high costs and logistical problems,” and all 3,000 or so employees will gradually be laid off. The unions expect 1,500 jobs to be cut in October and a further 1,100 in May 2025.

According to the company, the current plant director, Volker Germann, is to leave Brussels and be replaced by Thomas Bogus. The *Brussels Times* writes that the company expects to produce only 7,000 Q8 e-Tron SUVs by the end of the year—with two teams at 15 cars per hour. According to media reports, the successor to the Q8 e-tron will continue to be produced in Mexico from 2027.

For days now, employees of several supplier

companies have been camping in front of the Audi factory gates. They are directly affected by a closure of the factory, as they work almost exclusively for the carmaker from Ingolstadt. According to union representatives, these workers were “not informed by the companies about the ongoing talks.”

A protest march and mass rally of Audi employees in Brussels is planned for 10:30 a.m. on September 16 at the Brussels-North train station, which, according to the union, will also be extended to include workers from the metal, chemical and textile sectors. In addition to the autoworkers, employees of bus manufacturer Van Hool, which was dissolved due to bankruptcy at the beginning of the year, will also lead the protest march. An extraordinary works council meeting is scheduled for the following day, at which the VW Group management will allegedly share information about future investors.

The strikes in Brussels are part of a growing international movement of autoworkers in defence of their jobs and wages, which are under attack on all fronts. At a factory meeting at the main Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg on the same day, tens of thousands of workers protested against the company’s austerity drive and planned job cuts.

From January 24 to February 19, thousands of workers at the giant Audi assembly plant in the Mexican state of Puebla went on strike for higher wages. After the first offer of a 6.5 percent wage increase was rejected by 3,090 of the 4,161 workers, 3,139 workers then voted against the second offer of a general wage increase of 7 percent on February 9.

The supposedly “independent” SITAUDI union finally corralled the growing militancy of the strikers, enforcing the acceptance of a contract that, at 7 percent—plus a 3.2 percent increase in annual social

benefits—was barely higher than the offer workers had rejected. The union had originally demanded a 20 percent wage increase, which would have been nowhere near enough to overcome the poverty wages paid by carmakers in Mexico.

The attacks on the Belgian Audi workers and the simultaneous attempt to discipline the Mexican autoworkers are part of a broad international strategy by the Volkswagen Group. Last weekend, the company announced that it would terminate the “job security” agreement that has been in place so far, under which compulsory redundancies are excluded until 2029. Last year’s infamous “Performance” programme, which aims to save 10 billion euros annually by 2026, is now to be followed by savings of 4 billion euros.

From the standpoint of the Belgian and German trade union bureaucracies, the protests are a targeted attempt to let off steam and find a way to neutralise workers’ anger. Instead, workers should use the assemblies to discuss setting up their own rank-and-file action committees that are independent of the union and unite workers across workplaces, professional and national lines.

In the US, workers at VW competitor Stellantis and auto parts supplier Dakkota are also resisting massive job cuts and real wage cuts and have already begun to set up their own action committees in opposition to the United Auto Workers union.

The claim by the works council leaders and trade union officials that they have not received any information about the planned job cuts and have been “left in the dark” by management should be rejected with contempt by workers.

In reality, the bureaucracy of the trade unions and works councils shares the capitalist perspective of VW management and its fundamental goals of a “transformation” of the company at the expense of the workers. The German IG Metall union and the VW works council reps have helped to draw up the multi-billion “Performance” austerity plan and have closely coordinated it with company management and the federal government as part of the so-called “concerted action.”

There are signs in the media that the dispute in Belgium is to be dragged out over a long period of time with the help of the so-called “Renault Law” of 1997 in order to stall and wear down the workers. The law was

passed in the wake of the dramatic closure of the Renault plant in Vilvoorde, near Brussels, in February 1997, which cost over 3,000 workers their jobs from one day to the next. The law provides for close “consultation” between the corporations, trade unions and the government, similar to the law in Germany.

Against the nationalist conspiracies between the trade union bureaucracy and company management, workers must fight according to the principle of the international unity of the working class. The allies of the Belgian Audi workers are the workers of the supplier companies, as well as their Audi colleagues in Mexico—who are also to be more heavily exploited by means of the relocation of production—and the workers of the Volkswagen Group in Germany and worldwide.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which the *World Socialist Web Site* is committed to building, fights for this perspective. We call on autoworkers to form action committees that stand for the following demands:

- An immediate halt to all layoffs and the reinstatement of all those affected!
- A shorter workday with a simultaneous increase in wages to account for the shorter time required in the production of electric vehicles and to compensate for wages that have been stagnant for decades!
- Unite across all borders in the fight against the global jobs massacre!
- Expropriate the car companies and put them under the democratic control of the workers!

Send a Whatsapp message to +491633378340 and register using the form below to get in touch with other action committees in the automotive industry and beyond.



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