

Mass redundancies at auto parts suppliers Schaeffler and Continental in Germany

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With the help of the IG Metall union, many companies are currently pushing through long-planned mass redundancies and site closures. In Hesse, in addition to VW Baunatal and Opel/Stellantis, this particularly affects the automotive suppliers Schaeffler and Continental. The latest IG Metall contract in the metal and electrical industries, which guarantees two years of “industrial peace,” has given management the green light.

Continental plans to close its sites in Schwalbach am Taunus and Wetzlar by the end of 2025. Some of the workforce there are to move to Frankfurt or Babenhausen, with 630 jobs also being destroyed at the Frankfurt site. One hundred and ten jobs are also to be cut in Babenhausen. In total, Continental is cutting 1,200 of the remaining 8,000 jobs in the region, and 1,100 workers are to be forced to relocate. Continental plans to cut 7,150 jobs worldwide in order to reduce personnel costs by €400 million annually.

The Schaeffler Group, an important manufacturer of drive technology, has also announced job cuts in Schwalbach am Taunus. Schaeffler only took over Vitesco Technologies Group AG, the automotive supplier spun off from Continental, in October 2024. Just three weeks later, Schaeffler announced 139 job cuts at Vitesco in Schwalbach. The company plans to cut 3,700 jobs across Europe, 2,800 in Germany.

The company, which employs 120,000 people worldwide, wants to “utilise synergies” and “increase the savings potential to €290 million per year” over five years—in other words: lay off employees.

There is great anger and a willingness to fight among those impacted. A faint reflection of this can even occasionally be seen in the local press. For example, a young Continental worker from Wetzlar told *Hessenschau* regional news programme “All our plans

for the future have been turned upside down. We only got married last year, now have a child and wanted to build a house. That’s all in limbo now.”

Another called it a “slap in the face,” adding, “It’s sad that this is coming to an end.” Employees in administration, research and development have been particularly hard hit.

In the protests and warning strikes of recent weeks and months, the workforce has been almost totally united. There can be no doubt about their determination to fight. However, IG Metall is refusing to lead the necessary fight. It made this clear with its latest wage agreement where it committed to preventing industrial action at least until the early elections in February.

In addition, IG Metall chairwoman Christiane Brenner, who stands behind the agreement, has been a deputy chairwoman on Continental’s Supervisory Board for years at an annual salary of €270,000. With its officials in the pay of management, IG Metall blocked any resistance three and a half years ago when Continental destroyed over 10,000 jobs and flattened its large Aachen plant,

Many still remember the dispute at Continental in Karben and other branches in Hesse. Each was left to fight on its own. At no point did IG Metall organise serious industrial action uniting workers at all locations. Instead, it helped ensure the closure of one location after another. Karben will also be finally wound up next year.

Workers must draw definite conclusions from this experience. They need their own, independent rank-and-file action committees to overcome the division fostered by IG Metall between sites, groups and sectors and unite all employees, whether permanent or contract workers. The ultimate goal must be to take control of such important global production companies

themselves, to put them at the service of society and to expropriate their current owners.

These owners and their managers are waging a ruthless class war. The so-called “social partnership” has turned into a one-way street: The trade union, through its networks in the workplace, ensures that any resistance is nipped in the bud. The attacks on jobs and wages are part of a global capitalist offensive and a new wave of trade war paving the way for armed conflict.

The captains of industry and shareholders belong to a class of the super-rich. This applies above all to Maria-Elisabeth Schaeffler and her son Georg Schaeffler, who are in 27th place on the list of the 500 richest Germans, with a fortune of over €7.7 billion. The Schaeffler family is also the main shareholder of Continental AG and recently acquired its spun-off automotive division Vitesco.

The management boards of both companies were paid bonuses totalling millions, and in July, Continental shareholders decided to pay out around €440 million in dividends. Of this sum alone, 46 percent—more than €200 million euros—will once again end up in the Schaeffler family’s bank account.

Both Continental and Schaeffler owe the origins of their wealth to crimes committed under Nazi rule culminating in the Second World War. Here are some historical facts:

- At Continental, immediately after Hitler came to power in 1933, all managers were obliged to join the Nazi Party (NSDAP). The Executive Board, Supervisory Board and Works Council were purged of Jewish members and opponents of the regime. The company described itself as a “Christian and purely German company.”

- The war brought an unexpected economic upswing, as production—aircraft tyres, fuel tanks and a wide range of troop equipment—was geared entirely to the needs of Hitler’s army, the Wehrmacht. Continental was a “company important to the war effort” and a “model National Socialist [Nazi] company.”

- The exploitation of tens of thousands of forced labourers, including prisoners of war, “civilian workers from occupied territories” and concentration camp inmates, was particularly profitable. Continental did not even shy away from having the rubber soles of Sachsenhausen concentration camp prisoners tested for wear, which meant that people were hounded to death

on the “shoe test track.”

The origins of the Schaeffler fortune also goes back to the Nazi era. The company, which was officially founded in Herzogenaurach in 1940, actually had a Jewish predecessor: the “Davistan Krimmer, Plüsch und Teppichfabriken AG” owned by the Frank family, who had to flee Germany in the 1930s. This company, which was quickly renamed “Wilhelm Schaeffler AG,” also produced armaments for the Wehrmacht during the war and profited from the proximity of its owners, the direct ancestors of the current owners, to the Nazi regime.

Today, the struggle in defence of jobs and wages is once again inextricably linked to the fight against war and military rearmament. It must be waged internationally and on a socialist basis. IG Metall stands on the other side in this struggle. We therefore call on all Continental and Schaeffler employees: Take part in the formation of rank-and-file action committees!

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