

35,000 jobs threatened at Volkswagen

Works meeting at VW in Wolfsburg: “This is death in instalments”

Our reporters
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At the works meeting at the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg on Wednesday, Daniela Cavallo, Chairwoman of the General Works Council, defended the mass destruction of jobs and the wage cuts that she and the IG Metall union have agreed against criticism from the workforce.

The works meeting had been brought forward a month because of rumblings among the workforce. It is gradually becoming clearer that the IG Metall and Cavallo have betrayed and sold out the 120,000 VW workers in Germany. Contrary to their claims, no production location, no job and no wage will be safe after the destruction of 35,000 jobs and the reduction of real wages by up to 20 percent.

Everything is up in the air and not “secure” at all. This became evident before and during the works meeting. Even beforehand, Cavallo had said that it was unclear how what amounts to a jobs massacre would succeed without compulsory redundancies. “The 35,000 jobs that the company wants to cut by 2030 will not disappear as if by magic,” said Cavallo, adding that this would not be possible with just a few more taking early retirement.

But she did not explain how this would be achieved, because she is helping to work it out continuously with the corporation’s top management.

VW brand boss Thomas Schäfer painted the future of the Wolfsburg plant in the rosiest of colours, only to conclude: The electric T-Roc and the electric Golf successor, which are to be built in Wolfsburg from the end of the decade, would only come if the plant achieved the savings targets agreed between the Works Council and the Board of Management.

This is precisely what the so-called “Future Contract” agreed 20 December last year, which the union and works council hailed as a “Christmas miracle,” entails. A “revision clause” in the contract states that the company can demand further job cuts and wage reductions at any time if a plant does not achieve the targeted profit margins.

Representatives of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) distributed thousands of leaflets before the works meeting, calling for the workforce to have a vote on the contract, the full text of which workers have still not seen. But many of the workers we spoke to demanded exactly that: “When will the contract finally be revealed? We have a right to see it.”

In front of 20,000 employees, Cavallo played down the implications of the revision clause. It was not as significant as had been rumoured she claimed, obviously referring to the WSWS which had alerted workers to its existence. As she spoke defending the sell-out, workers reported that the atmosphere was very tense and that there was mostly dead silence.

Cavallo claimed that she and IG Metall had negotiated a contract in the midst of the crisis in the entire automotive industry “that is the envy of many workforces in this country.” This was a good starting point for the future of the VW Group, she said.

VW workers saw it differently. “I’m annoyed that the meeting was so peaceable,” said one. This “does not reflect reality.” IG Metall had explained “why it ‘had to’ make concessions and at the same time practised closing ranks with the company.”

“This is dying in instalments,” concluded one; another said bluntly, “We’ve been screwed over.”

One young apprentice was worried about his future and was considering changing companies. He was critical of the levels of social inequality: “Those who already have a lot of money are stuffing their pockets more and more, while those of us who work have less and less. That can’t be right.” He opposed the channelling of large sums of money into military rearmament.

An older VW production worker described his experiences at the company: “I’m from Wolfsburg. My father experienced the rise at VW, I only experienced the decline.” He had joined VW in order to have a permanent and secure

job. For a time, he was also a union shop steward, but resigned this post as could no longer reconcile withholding important information from his colleagues.

He now experienced on a daily basis how the pressure at VW was passed on from the top down. Today, they had to do more with fewer workers. He had heard from colleagues that workers were forced to admit their “mistakes” on the job in writing in discussions with management, which in turn was used as a means of exerting pressure on them.

He himself was increasingly angry and, like many who are ten years away from retirement, somewhat resigned. “A few more years and I’ll be out of here. I’ve already broken down physically. I feel sorry for the young people. They don’t even know what’s in store for them yet. In any case, I’ve told my son not to work at VW.”

The media were still spreading the lie that VW workers are doing very well, but he felt the effects of the increasing social crisis. He could no longer even afford his own Volkswagen, let alone an electric car. He did not know whether he would be able to keep his small apartment in view of the increased expenses and prices. When he came home after work, he often could not switch off and fall asleep because of the worries running through his head.

One worker was particularly upset that her disabled and impaired colleagues were losing their jobs. VW is selling off the operational plant logistics in Wolfsburg, with around 1,000 employees, to the private service provider DC World. It is mainly employees with disabilities and illnesses who are employed there through the Work2Work project.

A worker in this area recalled that “this whole mess” began with the diesel scandal in 2014, “which was the fault of those at the top; Winterkorn and the rest.” “And we, the lowest ranks, we can do the least, but we are the ones who suffer the most. The employees in production are getting older and older” and therefore sicker and sicker.

Many were critical of the works council and trade union. “They quickly finalised things before Christmas to make it look nice, but the details haven’t even been negotiated,” said one worker. Daniela Cavallo had been bought and paid for, he said.

“It was clear that they had already finalised everything beforehand,” said his colleague from the Work2Work project. “Anyone who’s worked in this company long enough knows that it was all a done deal.”

Almost everyone who spoke to us believed that resistance was urgently needed. “It should happen quickly now,” said one. But for him and others, the question is, how? Many are leaving IG Metall because it no longer achieves anything. One worker confirmed this and said, “I’m still in the union, but I’m thinking about leaving now.”

At the works meeting, Cavallo once again established that

she stands on the side of the company. She rejected the criticism that a better result could have been achieved with tougher industrial action. This would only have hardened the fronts further, which would probably have led to even more drastic restrictions, she claimed. “The result would have been a paralysed company mired in endless conflict.”

It could not be clearer that the top priority of the IG Metall and its Works Council is ensuring the company’s ability to act and that the interests of the VW Group take precedence over those of the workforce and its own members.

VW workers are realising that the attacks on them are linked to political developments. They only made the deal on 20 December “so that we wouldn’t go on strike in January and February because the federal elections are coming up”, said one worker. “They still want to save the backsides of the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and the Liberal Democrats (FDP). Let’s be honest.”

At the same time, many reject the nationalism of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). They know that with 670,000 employees in the VW Group worldwide, they can be a force to be reckoned with. Many workers agreed in the discussion that global production requires an international unification of workers.

The SGP members discussed how the SPD, the Left Party and the trade unions have suppressed serious resistance in the factories in recent decades and why rank-and-file action committees independent of the trade unions and a revolutionary workers’ party were therefore necessary.

When Cavallo says that the current economic developments—i.e., capitalism—make it impossible to defend jobs and wages, there is only one conclusion: capitalism is bankrupt and must be abolished. It must be replaced by a system that prioritises the interests of workers over the profit interests of corporations and the rich—by socialism.

We call on VW workers to contact us via WhatsApp at +491633378340 and to actively participate in setting up the action committees—in Wolfsburg and in the other plants affected by downsizing and closures.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact