

“We must speak one language!”: Striking Ford workers in Germany support international struggle

Our reporters
18 May 2025

Ford workers in Cologne, Germany are ready to fight for their jobs. This was clearly demonstrated by their 24-hour strike last Wednesday. At both Cologne Ford plants, in the nearby cities of Niehl and Merkenich, everything—production, development, administration—came to a standstill. At the beginning of May, Ford workers voted by 93.5 percent in favor of an indefinite strike.

A reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site* and supporters of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) spoke with striking Ford workers in Cologne about the issues in their struggle. Many have been employed by Ford for decades, their entire working lives.

The IWA-RFC has warned that officials from the works councils and IG Metall are selling out the struggle, as they previously did at Ford-Saarlouis. The IG Metall bureaucracy is opposed in principle to any genuine mobilisation of workers to defend the jobs. It has been in negotiations with the management about “social contracts” (Sozialtarifvertrag) since March.

In the “warning strike” Wednesday, the union did not oppose the job cuts but only called for higher severance payments for those who leave the plant “voluntarily.” There were once 20,000 workers at Ford; today there are 11,500. Another 2,900 are scheduled to leave by the end of 2027. The entire Ford plant in Cologne is at risk.

“Such ‘social contracts’ do not prevent plant closures or job cuts,” as the WSWs article on the strike states, “but ensure they are carried out smoothly.” The IWA-RFC is calling for the formation of Action Committees (Rank-and-File Committee) to fight to defend jobs and wages independently of IG Metall and unite German workers with their colleagues in the USA, Spain, Romania, India and elsewhere. The IWA-RFC has organized online meetings with international colleagues, such as in July 2022 with Ford workers from Germany, India and the USA.

Many Ford workers we spoke with on Wednesday said clearly: “I don’t want a severance package; I want to keep my job.” In conversations with the WSWs, Stinos Dinas and Cüneyt Sentürk explained their hopes and concerns and said they would be prepared to take part in internationally coordinated industrial action by Ford workers.

WSWS: *What do you think would be necessary in the current dispute?*

Stinos Dinas: A much more militant strike would be necessary.

We would have to have real industrial action. I saw that management is at the plant. I ask myself why they are allowed in? Why don’t we shut them out completely? Apparently, IG Metall does not want to be quite so militant about it.

WSWS: *What do you think about the negotiations on the social plan?*

SD: Even if most of us would certainly prefer a future at Ford, some would probably be satisfied with a high severance payment and would get a job elsewhere. What is being demanded now is also a relatively large sum [200,000 euro or more]. It’s their way of keeping the workforce quiet.

But we should fight for our future rather than for a high severance payment. A severance payment is not a secure future. That’s too short-sighted, because in the end all large industries work in the same way. Good work is relocated to low-wage countries. The fact is that there are no prospects for the future going about it this way.

WSWS: *We think it’s crucial that workers here join forces with workers in other car plants, especially with workers in the US, but also in Spain and Romania and elsewhere. What do you think about that?*

SD: That would be great. Absolutely. That’s exactly what I think. We’re in a situation here where the industry is moving away because conditions are still worse in other countries.

WSWS: *We will also publish this interview in English, so it will also be read by American car workers. What would you like to say to them?*

SD: Fight back against fascism, that’s the first thing. I don’t know what the conditions are like in the USA, what kind of labor struggles they’re having right now.

WSWS: *The president of the United Auto Workers union in the US, Shawn Fain, who supported Kamala Harris and the Democrats in the presidential election, has sided with Donald Trump! In particular, he claims Trump’s tariff policy is in the interests of American workers. IG Metall’s stance here is very similar.*

SD: Yes, this also affects plants in Spain and [the German state of] Saarland, which have been played off against each other. In the past, we were always played off against Romania. We were constantly told that production was cheaper in Romania. At times, we even built the same engine as in Romania. They threatened to

relocate our engine production entirely.

WSWS: *What do you think about setting up international rank-and-file committees that fight together and not let themselves be divided?*

SD: Correct and important. I just don't see the potential at the moment. I'm more left-leaning, but many of my colleagues are not. That's why I know how difficult it is to build something like that in the workforce. But it's definitely necessary. My ideal of a world is communism. And that's why it's important to set up such committees, because we could control everything.

WSWS: *Yes, workers keep the whole society running. It was recently announced that there is to be a development project for new military tanks here in Cologne, funded to the tune of 100 billion euro. Are you discussing this among yourselves?*

SD: Well, there were rumors that Rheinmetall [a large German arms manufacturer] would be moving into our halls here. But they've again denied that's true. I don't know what's true—whether the whole thing is a rumor or real. There are workers among us who are already asking themselves whether they could go straight over to Rheinmetall if they were to take over something here. I always say directly to my colleagues: then you might as well murder children yourselves, like in Gaza right now, for example. I think it's exactly the same thing. In arms production, you are complicit in war. In any case, you are participating in something terrible. I don't want that, not even for good money.

Cüneyt Sentürk *has worked at Ford for 40 years. He is very worried about current political and economic developments.*

Cüneyt Sentürk: What is happening in the world? What is happening in Europe? What is happening in Germany? When you see what has happened in the last four years, including economically, it really makes you think. I live here in Germany; I grew up in Turkey.

Germany has always been a superpower when it comes to industry and the economy. Now plants are being closed everywhere, especially in the automotive industry. That used to be Germany's main pillar. And if that shakes, then everything else shakes too and you can see it everywhere, be it the butcher, the tailor or the small baker on the corner: insolvency is looming everywhere. How do we get out of this hole? That is the question.

I've been with Ford for a long time, 40 years, and I've experienced some bad times. But I've never experienced anything like the current situation. It sounds as if Ford wants to withdraw from Germany, from Europe.

That's a real shame, because we've been a big community here for generations. I have two school-age children myself. They want to start an apprenticeship or a dual course of study soon, preferably here at Ford. I could then pass the baton on to them, because I'll be retiring in a few years. It will be like me and my father, who also worked here for 30 years, all through the 1970s. I started here in the mid-80s.

It really hurts deep down that this is slowly falling into the abyss, that it's being steered in that direction. People are suffering as a result. They have less and less money, everything is getting more expensive. They now have to count every penny. You go into a supermarket with a shopping cart, buy more than 100 euro worth and you can still see the bottom of the cart. It's just bad.

It's capitalism. Yes, you have to stick together. I hope there will be a better policy so that the economy can be rebuilt. That is also the hope of future generations.

WSWS: *Was your father also involved in the big strike in 1973?*

CS: Yes, of course, he started at Ford in 1969 and was there during the strike. I still have old black and white photos of him. I hope that the big strike won't happen now, that there will be an agreement. But agreement or not, we want the economy to pick up again here. We need to produce more again, people need to have more purchasing power, that's the simple wish of everyone. Hence, this strike.

WSWS: *We think that the strike must be conducted with the aim of defending jobs and not to get as good a "social contract" possible.*

CS: Exactly, that's it. We built good cars here for years and then in the end we just have two electric vehicles. People can't afford the electric cars they want. Who can afford a car for 50,000 euro in this economic climate? But even those who can afford the cars aren't buying them. That's why there's this fear here, existential fear.

It's not just about cars. People can no longer afford an apartment either. I'm looking right now for my daughter, who wants to go to university. But €1,200 for a 50-square meter apartment here in Cologne—how are we supposed to do that? I have to support my daughter, and my son will be coming soon. How am I supposed to stop working at Ford?

WSWS: *We propose to set up independent rank-and-file committees, independent of the IG Metall works councils and officials. These committees will organize the employees not only here in Cologne, but throughout Germany, and above all in other countries, in the fight to defend jobs and wages in the USA, Romania and Spain. What do you think about that?*

CS: Yes, that's what we have to do: Together we are strong. It's not enough for Germany to fight alone. We all have to stick together. So I'm definitely on board. We have to speak one language.

The IWA-RFC calls on Ford workers to get in touch with the Ford Rank-and-File Committee to prepare a fight in defense of the main plant in Cologne and oppose all job cuts. A second Saarlouis must not be allowed to happen. Send a Whatsapp message to the following number: +491633378340 or register in the form at the end of this article.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact