

Thyssenkrupp Steel demands €200 million in wage cuts

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The early works council election at Thyssenkrupp Steel's largest plant has only just ended, and already the IG Metall union is preparing to implement the attacks being demanded by the company's top management.

For several weeks now, IG Metall officials and works council representatives have been sitting down with the executive board to coordinate the "restructuring" of Thyssenkrupp's steel division. The plan is to cut 11,000 of the 27,000 jobs and reduce wages by 10 percent.

On Saturday, the union for the first time presented the steel management's concrete proposals for the planned cost-cutting. IG Metall listed 10 points:

- Elimination of all one-off payments, such as Christmas and holiday bonuses
- Scrapping of long-service bonuses
- Pay freeze in the upcoming collective bargaining round
- Reduction of the working week from 34 to 33 hours with no wage compensation
- Abolition of the collectively agreed extra "winter day"
- Reduction in working hours without pay compensation for non-collective-contract employees (details not specified)
- Elimination of the six additional days off for non-collective-contract employees, though these can be "bought back" by accepting pay cuts
- Halving of on-call duty additional pay
- Fewer apprentices, no permanent positions for trainees
- Elimination of employer's contributions to employee savings schemes

Altogether, these measures are intended to save €200 million a year. The steel board under Dennis Grimm

wants to lock them in for—initially—four years.

In its leaflet, IG Metall loudly rails against this "list of poisons," but makes its stance clear right at the start: "There is no dispute that the economic situation at Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe is extremely strained." Chief negotiator Knut Giesler is quoted as saying: "It's already five past midnight, sad as it is, TKSE has become a restructuring case."

That is why IG Metall and the works council had no fundamental objection from the outset to the loss of 11,000 jobs. They merely insisted, as always, that this should happen without compulsory redundancies. The demand for a 10 percent reduction in labour costs has long been on the table.

At this point, a clear warning is needed: Giesler, IG Metall's regional secretary, is the one who, with the help of the union apparatus and the works council, will implement all these attacks in collaboration with steel management. When he is quoted in the leaflet saying "a grab this hard into our colleagues' wallets is not something IG Metall will accept," regarding next week's negotiations, what it really means is that the attack on workers' pay will simply be organised differently.

Giesler and his negotiating team will arrange the jobs massacre in a "socially acceptable" manner—with early retirement schemes, phased retirement, severance packages and so on. Anyone who doesn't qualify for these because they are too young or too expensive will be shunted into a so-called "transfer company," a short stop before the dole office.

Just as they are working out how to destroy one in four jobs, they will find mechanisms to implement a 10 percent reduction in personnel costs. It would not be the first time they have agreed a temporary reduction in working hours without full wage compensation to shift

costs onto the workforce. It is quite possible that the already agreed closures of smaller plants—such as in Bochum, Kreuztal-Eichen or even the Krupp Mannesmann steelworks (HKM) in southern Duisburg with 3,000 jobs—will be brought forward.

IG Metall has always displayed great “creativity” when it comes to enforcing the interests of shareholders.

In the past, the union has always defused workforce opposition by staging loud protests and media-friendly demonstrations. It will try the same again this time. In the past, government representatives from the federal and North Rhine-Westphalia state governments have often been invited along so they could placate workers with promises—of subsidies for the switch to “green steel,” for example.

IG Metall will also play up the importance of the domestic steel industry for wartime needs. After all, it supports the pro-war policies of both the old and the new federal government, and has made it clear in this context that it supports shifting the enormous costs of rearmament and war onto the working class.

Yet despite all the militant rhetoric of the works council reps and union officials at their events, not one of their announced “fights” has ever materialised. Almost a year ago, Ali Güzel, chair of the steel works council, shouted outside the head office in Duisburg: “We will start fighting tomorrow. Someone has to stop this madness. Who if not us?” Since then, nothing of the sort has happened.

It will be no different this time if Güzel and company have their way. IG Metall and its works council now claim: “We say: Enough is enough! We stand together. We fight together. And we will not be divided. ... Now is the time to show our presence and stand united.”

By “showing presence,” the bureaucrats mean more noisy protests. The emphasis on “closing ranks” is a warning to anyone who really wants to fight: do not defy the dictates of the IG Metall works council and the union apparatus behind it. Submit and stay quiet.

They will use the recent works council election as a bargaining chip—an election that was brought forward for precisely this reason. Three weeks ago, we wrote, “The election serves solely to push through the job massacre that the company has announced.”

We rejected the argument of IG Metall trust body leader and works councillor Dirk Riedel that IG Metall

needed “a mandate from the rank and file” through the works council election. Instead, we said Riedel “will wave the result of the election under the nose of anyone who objects to the social plan presented in the summer and prattle on about the “mandate IG Metall received in the election.” The works council election is intended to nip any oppositional efforts in the bud.

That is why the following appeal bears repeating:

We call on Thyssenkrupp steelworkers—not only in the north of Duisburg—to help build action committees. Break out of the narrow, blinkered framework of workplace struggles dictated by IG Metall. Look beyond your own immediate situation and contact us! The time to act is now—otherwise, the gradual winding down of the steel industry will continue until only a small war-essential remnant remains. Send a WhatsApp message to +49 163 3378340 and register using the form below.



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