

Volkswagen: Opposition to layoffs and cuts is growing

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Opposition is growing among Volkswagen employees to the sweeping cuts to jobs and wages worked out with the help of the IG Metall union. Union officials, taking note of this, are warning: “The mood is turning.” Many workers are looking for a way to break through the strict control of the IG Metall bureaucracy.

The creation of independent rank-and-file action committees that unite workers across all sites who are willing to fight—and who place the interests of the employees above those of the billionaire shareholders—is becoming an increasingly vital task.

At the end of last week, business weekly *Wirtschaftswoche* reported that since the beginning of the year, “a loss of more than 2,000 IG Metall members” had been recorded at Volkswagen’s headquarters in Wolfsburg. This figure already considers new memberships, the magazine wrote, citing “insiders.” At the current rate of resignations, as many as 3,000 members could have left the union within weeks. The reason given was the sell-out of workers’ interests through the “Future Collective Agreement” signed in December 2024.

IG Metall at VW dismissed the report as “false information.” In a written statement, the union claimed the figures “lacked any basis,” claiming the unionisation rate of IG Metall at VW had for years remained consistently above 90 percent.

The resignations from IG Metall at VW in Wolfsburg were currently “predominantly due to predictable developments,” such as retirement, early retirement, or job changes through voluntary redundancy schemes.

IG Metall does not disclose its membership figures at VW Wolfsburg. It is therefore unclear how many of the 2,000 former members are still working at the plant. But even employees moving into retirement, early retirement or other employment are not obliged to resign from the union.

What is clear, however, is that the more obvious it becomes that it was only the beginning of ever deeper attacks, the more discontent with last year’s contract is growing.

On 20 December, under the leadership of IG Metall official Thorsten Gröger and General Works Council chairwoman Daniela Cavallo, the following wage and job massacre was lauded as a “Christmas miracle”:

- Elimination of one in four jobs in Germany, a total of

35,000, including 15,000 in Wolfsburg alone.

- Pay cuts of up to 20 percent.
- More flexible working hours, with the possibility of reducing them to “collectively as little as 28 hours per week.”
- Abolition of In-House Agreement 1; more than 30,000 employees must transfer to the less favourable In-House Agreement 2.
- Reduction in training/apprentice places from 1,400 to just 600 per year.

In return, the “security of all sites” and a “waiver of compulsory redundancies” were promised. But a “review clause” allows all such commitments to be revoked in the event of “significant changes to the economic framework conditions.” Nothing is guaranteed—not sites, not jobs, not wages and salaries!

Particularly threatened with closure are the plants in Zwickau, Emden, Osnabrück and Dresden.

In Osnabrück, vehicle production will cease in summer 2027. Germany’s largest arms manufacturer, Rheinmetall, has expressed interest in converting the site for war production.

In Emden, only one assembly line is planned for now, and in Zwickau only one from 2027 onwards. Since this is hardly profitable, the future of both electric vehicle plants is uncertain.

In Dresden, VW has long been in talks with the Technical University (TU) Dresden about a research campus at the Gläserne Manufaktur. But according to the Dresden city council, the ID.3 production, halted in December, cannot easily be replaced by research and teaching because of concrete building and land-use plans. The future here also remains nebulous.

Even at the Wolfsburg headquarters, it is becoming apparent that within two or three years it will no longer resemble the once-largest European factory complex, which until recently employed more than 65,000 people.

In Wolfsburg, around 15,000 jobs are to be cut. In Technical Development, about one-third of all positions (around 4,000 of 12,000) are to be eliminated by 2030. Personnel costs in administration are to be reduced by 20 percent by 2026, and then by another 3 percent each year from 2027 to 2030. Overall, personnel costs are to be cut by nearly a third by 2030.

How many production jobs in Wolfsburg will be axed is still

unclear. But workers will certainly be affected by the fact that from 2027, the VW Golf—one of the world’s best-selling cars—will only be produced in Mexico, while a new mass-market model costing under €20,000, the ID.1, will be built in Portugal. An electric version of the Golf is not planned for Wolfsburg until 2029.

Works Council chief Cavallo has already announced a “temporary four-day week” from 2027, stressing that employees must build up their working-time accounts in order to avoid substantial wage losses.

So far, more than 20,000 employees have already signed severance or early retirement agreements.

That this would trigger opposition and resignations was clear to IG Metall and the VW Works Council from the outset. This is why they abolished holiday pay for everyone and instead introduced a special bonus exclusively for IG Metall members.

The IG Metall’s response to the *Wirtschaftswoche* report therefore also states: “At the same time, thousands of employees have newly joined IG Metall in the course of the latest collective bargaining dispute.”

These mafia-style methods have not prevented opposition to IG Metall from growing across all plants—on the contrary. *Wirtschaftswoche* cited “high-ranking trade unionists” saying the resignations could be only the beginning: “Frustration is high, and the mood is turning.”

Wirtschaftswoche also pointed to next spring’s Works Council elections. In Wolfsburg, Cavallo will face off against former senior IG Metall official Frank Patta. The agreement Cavallo signed in December 2024 was said to be fuelling support for Patta’s “opposition” list. IG Metall accused the magazine of “promoting certain, clearly identifiable interests through the media.”

In reality, Cavallo and Patta differ little. Cavallo, through her long-standing role in the Works Council and on the company Supervisory Board, is far removed from the rank-and-file and speaks like a member of the VW Executive Board. It would hardly be surprising if she were to succeed VW’s former HR chief, Gunnar Kilian, whose dismissal she was partly responsible for. Germany’s “co-determination” legislation, supposedly ensuring “worker representation” within companies, means the HR Board position at VW falls under the union’s purview. It is by far the most lucrative post for a union bureaucrat, with Kilian receiving more than €6.5 million in the 2024 financial year, including pension contributions.

In recent years, Patta, a full-time works council representative in production, has criticised the autocratic—in his own words “monarchist”—style of the General Works Council, first under Bernd Osterloh and now under Cavallo. But he comes from the same stable—or, to extend his own metaphor, the same court. *Business Insider* already reported four years ago that Patta earned “around €300,000 in total,” which is more than Cavallo.

Patta was the senior IG Metall representative in Wolfsburg

for five years before Osterloh brought him into the VW Works Council in 2012 and made him Secretary-General, heading the World and European Works Councils. In 2018, he had to give up this position due to internal conflicts and became a “simple” works council rep. He has since been expelled from IG Metall and now controls four of 73 seats on the Wolfsburg Works Council with his “Alternative List.”

As an IG Metall functionary, he himself suppressed opposition both in Wolfsburg and worldwide. Temporary workers at VW’s Chinese plants, who appealed in vain to the World Works Council for equal pay, were abandoned by Patta, who did nothing.

Now, this long-standing IG Metall courtier criticises Cavallo’s “Future Agreement” primarily because of its impact on jobs in Wolfsburg—as if only the workforce there were affected by job cuts.

IG Metall, its works council reps, and Patta are all experienced in playing VW sites off against each other to enforce management’s cuts. Workers at every VW site must therefore establish action committees in irreconcilable opposition to the IG Metall apparatus. These must unite all workers who truly want to fight for their rights and gains. Action committees must adopt the following principles:

- Disempower the IG Metall and Works Council apparatus, stop the backroom deals between works council leaders, managers, and shareholder representatives! Action committees must bring together workers who want to fight, regardless of union membership.
- Not one cent for dividends! The right to jobs and wages is more important than shareholder greed. Billion-euro profits must not flow into the pockets of investors but must be used for workers and their jobs.
- For international cooperation of all workforces! The defence of jobs, wages and working conditions is only possible across sites and borders.

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