

Ford Cologne: Reject IG Metall's so-called "Social Contract"

Dietmar Gaisenkersting
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Workers must reject the so-called "Social Contract" negotiated by the IG Metall union (IGM) at Ford Cologne. The union bureaucrats around General Works Council Chairman Benjamin Gruschka and the IGM representative for Cologne/Leverkusen, Kerstin Klein, must be stripped of their mandate for all further negotiations.

The sole purpose of the contract is to drive 3,560 workers out of the plant and set the course for its complete closure. In addition to the 2,900 redundancies already agreed, another 660 workers are to be forced out who had resisted the last round of job cuts.

To make sure the cuts go through quickly this time, IG Metall and its works council representatives have increased the pressure on the workforce with the present deal. Anyone who refuses the first severance offer will receive a second, lower one worth only 75 percent of the first. Anyone who rejects that will be made compulsorily redundant. Since the social selection rules then apply, younger, unmarried and childless workers would be at a disadvantage compared to older ones.

These perfidious Mafia-like methods are designed to divide the workforce. Each worker is left to make his or her decision alone. The "solidarity" that the union likes to invoke is thus perverted. Whenever IG Metall calls for solidarity, it has nothing to do with genuine unity. The bureaucracy wants workers to shut their mouths and submit to the diktat of the union and its works council.

The talk of excluding compulsory redundancies until 2032 is not worth the paper it is written on. With the "Social Contract," the corporation has the lever in its hand to shut down the Cologne plant, just as it has already done in Saarlouis. It applies to every future operational change.

The "overall solution" that IGM and the works council talk about is the basis for the gradual closure of the plant, which is already beginning to take shape. Only recently, management announced that the second shift at the plant would be abolished. One-shift operation will then be used to justify the next round of job massacres, since it is unprofitable from the corporation's point of view.

It is therefore telling that the union is keeping the wording of the "Social Contract" and all its sub-agreements, which are said to run to 60 pages in total, under lock and key. The Cologne workforce is supposed to vote on a contract they do not even know anything about. Only the voluntary severance conditions are known. Since these are a little higher than usual, they are intended to increase pressure on each individual.

This is entirely in line with the previous policy of IG Metall and the works council. In recent years they have drawn up one job-cutting programme after another. Each time, it was claimed that this would secure Ford's competitiveness and survival in Germany—until the next round of job eliminations came. From more than 20,000 employees in Cologne, only about 8,000 are to remain under the present agreement. Every new contract has brought the plant's shutdown closer.

When the Cologne workforce tried to resist the latest round of cuts earlier this year, IG Metall was forced to call a strike in May, which over 93 percent of members had demanded—only to call it off again after 24 hours. IG Metall does not want strikes and makes this clear again and again.

It has therefore linked approval of the "Social Contract" in the ballot with the rejection of further strikes. IGM asks: "Do you want to reject the negotiated result and enforce other demands with all

union means, including strikes?”—and is campaigning for a clear “No”!

The linking of the “Social Contract” with the strike question means that just 25 percent “yes” votes are enough to approve it. For a strike, according to the union statutes, at least 75 percent approval is required.

In their appeal for approval, Gruschka, Klein and IGM shop steward body leader David Lüdtké repeatedly attack workers who want to fight. “Unfortunately, a viable future strategy cannot be forced through by a strike,” Lüdtké declares.

“A transfer of operations or even the closure of entire areas cannot be prevented by strikes,” adds Klein, warning against rejecting the contract: “A renegotiation of individual points is excluded. Further negotiations and strikes could therefore ultimately lead to significantly worse conditions.”

It is no accident that IG Metall demands in large, bold letters on its leaflet: “Vote against continuation of the strike!”

It is obvious that the works council and IG Metall will continue to do everything to prevent a strike. They demonstrated this in Saarlouis under Works Council Chairman Markus Thal. Gruschka and his Cologne apparatus are now following their example.

Rejection of the “Social Contract” in the ballot must therefore be accompanied by strike preparations, independently and separately from the union apparatus. All workers who really want to fight must unite in an action committee. IGM works council reps and shop stewards who support the contract have no place in this committee, whose members must coordinate their joint action:

- IG Metall and the works council must be forced to release the contract details and all its sub-agreements immediately.
- Klein, Gruschka and Co. do not want to negotiate further or strike further. Their mandate must be withdrawn. They must be prevented from concluding even one more agreement in the name of the workforce.
- Ford is an international corporation with 171,000 workers in plants on four continents. Contact must be established with them—in Germany, Europe, North America and worldwide. Contact must also be made with colleagues in other companies in the car, supplier and steel industries, etc., who face the same attacks.

Such international strategy and cooperation are

necessary to resist the blackmail of management and the works council. This is a perspective based on the common interests of all workers worldwide and opposed to the logic of the capitalist profit system, which the union and works council functionaries defend tooth and nail.

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