Rebellion begins against IG Metall union at Bosch in Germany

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In the face of sharp attacks on jobs and wages in the automotive and supplier industries, a rebellion is developing against the IG Metall union and its works council apparatus who are busy enforcing those attacks. This process is already well under way at Bosch Automotive Steering GmbH in Schwäbisch Gmünd, in the state of Baden-Württemberg. The founding of a new trade union organisation there, in opposition to IG Metall, is imminent.

In a works meeting on November 22 last year, Bosch management in Schwäbisch Gmünd informed the 3,450 employees that by 2030 a total of 1,900 jobs would go, mainly in the production of steering systems.

This formed part of the corporation's announcement that 9,000 jobs would be eliminated across the world's largest supplier group. That figure was raised again by a further 13,000 this past September. It is the largest downsizing in the company's history. Robert Bosch GmbH employs around 418,000 workers worldwide, almost 130,000 of them in Germany, most of whom—around 87,000—work in research and development.

As early as 2017, IG Metall and the works council concluded "framework agreements" and supposed "site security agreements." These stipulated that the workforce in Schwäbisch Gmünd would be reduced to 2,850 jobs by the end of 2026. An additional 1,300 jobs were then to be cut from 2027. In the meantime, the works council and IG Metall have signed off on the destruction of 1,700 jobs, rather than the originally planned 1,550.

The IG Metall apparatus has justified this, as it has done a thousand times before in other companies. "We had to make painful compromises," IG Metall's senior representative in the region, Heike Madan, recited in routine fashion after the agreement was signed in June. "In view of the very difficult initial situation we nevertheless achieved an acceptable result," lied the IG Metall official. And, yes, there is again a so-called "site guarantee," not worth the paper it is written on, this time until 2030.

Bosch will close production at plant II; "Of 36 hectares, Bosch will keep six hectares, the rest is to be marketed," reported Schwäbisch Gmünd's spokesperson for economic development, Alexander Groll, in the municipal council in mid-October. Bosch will retain only the administrative and office buildings and a test track. The deputy chair of the works council, Andreas Reimer, claims to know nothing about this.

Bosch declares that the company aims to become competitive again through the job cuts. In order to reduce costs, production of steering systems for commercial vehicles is being relocated to Hungary–with the support of IG Metall.

Resistance to this policy and to the role of IG Metall, which millions of workers are currently experiencing first hand, has already erupted at Bosch in Schwäbisch Gmünd. The then deputy chair of the works council, Hüseyin Ekinci, refused to sign a confidentiality agreement and informed the workforce at a works meeting about the secret talks and plans of IG Metall, the works council and management. He was then voted out at the instigation of the works council, chaired by Claudio Bellomo.

Bosch works council rep Mustafa Simsek also opposed this. He accused some works council members of having learned of the downsizing plans from management months beforehand and having kept them secret. He reports that management had already met with works council members on November 5 and 12, 2024, and thus days before the downsizing plans were announced on November 22, including to discuss "the closure of plant II." His questions at a works meeting as to the reasons for the secrecy were not answered by the official keepers of secrets.

Simsek said he was preparing the founding of a new trade union organisation in order to be able once again represent the interests of the workforce. The new organisation was already in the process of being founded and was to be active nationwide, he said. "We are thinking big and we intend to act big." Around 200 employees were already involved; he expected many more: "We are going to see a rush. The movement has become an 'avalanche' that can no longer be stopped."

Confidently, Simsek declared: "Many people's patience has run out. Now the employees are organising themselves." IG Metall had distanced itself from people's concerns, "When a trade union loses its voice, the workers must raise their own." The new "employees' association" was "a warning call to the entire republic." "What is happening here is a wake-up call for all employees in Germany: we must once again take our interests into our own hands," he stressed. The association was to be open to everyone: "Origin, religion, political stance—that does not matter."

Simsek has stood up to the apparatus and has therefore won support among workers. The response to his initiative shows the enormous anger over IG Metall's role as a company police. This self-organisation of workers and rebellion against the apparatus are to be welcomed. But what is decisive is that it is really carried out by rank-and-file and does not become a new bureaucratic apparatus. It must be democratic, accountable and international in

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orientation.

It must be uncompromising. Jobs and wages, the livelihood of the working masses, must not become bargaining chips in order to secure the competitiveness, that is, the profits, of the company.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) welcome the self-initiative of the workforce. Four years ago, we instigated the building of the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). "The founding of the International Workers' Alliance is the indispensable response to a global crisis," we wrote in our appeal, calling on workers worldwide "to organise themselves independently of the trade union apparatuses and bureaucracies in order to fight together for their rights."

The International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is creating a network of independent and democratic action committees in factories and workplaces on an international level. It serves as an instrument for the coordination and exchange of information among workers worldwide, so that they can jointly protect and defend their jobs, wages and gains.

The international orientation of the IWA-RFC corresponds to the character of production and of capitalism. It is impossible for workers to defend their jobs and rights effectively, no matter how much commitment and willingness to fight they show, so long as they are left on their own and remain separated from the rest of the international workforce of a globally active corporation.

Simsek and his associates want to defend jobs "without compromise." "We will not allow jobs here to be cut or relocated abroad quietly and secretly. We stand for the people here on the ground—and we do so resolutely," says Simsek. But for "the people on the ground," unity with people all over the world is absolutely essential. Jobs in commercial vehicle production, for example, cannot be defended without fellow workers in Hungary.

Workers—not only at Bosch—face challenges that go far beyond the previous forms of so-called representation within the framework of "social partnership." Globalisation and the ability to relocate production to another corner of the earth at short notice have pulled the rug from under the unions' feet. Under these conditions, their nationalist perspective—that of strengthening the competitiveness of their "own" company, because, according to trade union logic, only then can jobs be preserved—turns into the justification of boundless attacks. In global competition, the workforce in Germany is competing with that in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, China, Vietnam and so on. Thus, wages and working conditions in the poorest country become the worldwide benchmark.

On this basis, the unions agree to job cuts, wage reductions and worse working conditions. They play one site off against another, divide workers from their colleagues in other countries and boycott every serious resistance. And not only that. In the escalating international trade war, the unions also stand at the side of "their own" government.

In an article on the Europe-wide economic and political crisis, we recently wrote: "The unions also support their government's respective war policies. Whereas the IG Metall union used to promote the slogan 'swords to plowshares,' it now advocates converting auto factories into tank factories."

Despite all the personal corruption and degeneracy among the union officials, who sell themselves for lucrative posts on supervisory and management boards, their role as the extended arm of big shareholders and managers, as factory police ensuring calm and order in the workforce, is an expression of these objective developments.

The attempt to replace IG Metall while leaving the social framework untouched is therefore doomed to fail. Simsek says: "The works council was not elected to act as a puppet of the employer. Its task is to represent the interests of the workforce."

That is not entirely correct. Even though works councils are not obliged to approve every dirty trick of the companies, their class collaboration is enshrined in law. Works councils were legally anchored by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) government under Friedrich Ebert after the November Revolution of 1918 as a response to the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils, modelled on the revolutionary soviets. The Works Constitution Act, which came into force in November 1952 and was fundamentally revised in January 1972, further anchored the class collaboration of the works councils.

The law obliges management and works council to "work together in a spirit of mutual trust" and to maintain confidentiality. It forbids the works council from calling for industrial action. Instead, it is required, once a month, "to negotiate contentious issues with a serious will to reach agreement and to make proposals for the settlement of differences of opinion." (§ 74 para. 2 Works Constitution Act)

This legally regulated class collaboration is directed against the workers and against the defence of their interests through "measures of industrial struggle."

The newly developing liberation of the workforce from the straitjacket of the unions is therefore a tremendous step forward. What is now necessary is a further bold step: firstly, the building of independent action committees that connect and unite the working masses across all sites, companies, sectors and national borders, so that they can successfully confront shareholders, banks and corporate owners.

Secondly, the defence of workers' interests requires a perspective that goes beyond capitalism, that is, beyond private ownership of the means of production and the nation state system: workers' interests before profit interests, international unity rather than national division.

We invite all those who wish to oppose IG Metall policies to contact us and discuss the next necessary steps. Send us a WhatsApp message on +49 163 3378340 and fill in the form below.

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