

Germany: Mass factory closures in Hesse require an international, socialist response

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With the end of 2025, production ended at the long standing Buderus steelworks in Wetzlar in the German state of Hesse. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Several plants northern Hesse are in the process of being shut down, including Goodyear in Fulda and the Continental sites in Wetzlar and Schwalbach/Taunus. As a result several thousand jobs are being lost in the region.

The mass job cuts, caused by a growing crisis of the global capitalist system, require a political perspective in order to defend every job and place key industries in the hands of the working population. The current wave of plant closures is not just a case of ‘regrettable isolated cases,’ but rather an expression of a systematic restructuring by big business in the interests of profit. Without regard for social impact, unprofitable plants are being shut down and thousands of jobs destroyed.

With the shutdown of the blast furnace in October and the loss of 470 jobs by the end of 2025, a 300-year history of steel production in Hesse now comes to an end. Founded in 1731 as a steel company, Buderus dominated the entire Wetzlar-Giessen region. But In recent years, the plant was first sold to Bosch, again to the Austrian steel company Voestalpine and then, at the end of 2024, transferred to the private equity firm Mutares. A ‘locust’ that derives its profits not from steel production but from buying up and reselling factories in crisis, the new owner has now broken up the company, using every trick in the book.

The steelworks, which until recently produced over 300,000 tonnes of crude steel per year using state-of-the-art (‘green’) technology, has been deemed unprofitable in the wake of the energy crisis brought on by the NATO proxy war with Russia. Thus, they support the war against Russia with the cynical argument that arms contracts could secure steel

workers’ jobs!

The Buderus hot rolling mill was sold to Georgsmarienhütte (GMH, Germany’s third-largest steel group after Thyssenkrupp and Salzgitter). That facility’s roughly 600 jobs are also at risk, with GMH also fighting for survival. According to GMH CEO Anne-Marie Grossmann, its energy costs have risen from €37 million to €84 million in just four years.

Mutares has sold off the Buderus drop forge, where around 70 employees manufacture drive, transmission and axle components for commercial vehicles, to the FerrAl United Group, which produces for the arms industry. The plant will remain open based on hopes for military orders, Stephen Mayer, IG Metall union official in Mittelhessen, promised last August.

IG Metall has helped organise the shutdowns tab at every stage. It has gone along with all of the management demands, including Mutares’ withdrawal of Buderus from the industry-wide collective bargaining agreement (such agreements are the norm in Germany). For a long time, IG Metall pinned its hopes on subsidies from the federal government to save the site.

Mutares has taken over other important companies. These include: the operations of transport company Arriva—a subsidiary of Germany’s national railroad Deutsche Bahn’s—in Denmark, Serbia and Poland; firefighting equipment maker Magirus; and a controlling stake in Peugeot Motorcycles. It then began to dismantle all of them.

For its part IG Metall never sounded the alarm and refused to call upon the affected workers to conduct joint resistance. They limited themselves to organising ineffective funeral marches for the doomed plants and carrying out negotiations on “mitigating measures.”

On 9 October, IG Metall organised a funeral march

through Wetzlar, which the Stalinist German Communist Party (DKP) notably called “a final walk for our steelworks.” Since then, the company works councils and IG Metall officials have been winding down jobs, negotiating social plans and severance payments, and “appealing” to the capitalists to curb their brutality.

In its end of year statement the IG Metall for North Hesse managed to avoid mentioning by name Buderus, Bosch, Mutares or the German government (which is a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union, and Social Democratic Party). Instead, the author, local IG Metall representative Oliver Scheld, expressed a pious wish for “social responsibility on the part of employers.” He wrote: “Constant job cuts and relocations are the wrong answers. Participation, co-determination and training are the right way to ensure that everyone can have a secure future.”

The pseudo-left DKP commented in a whining tone: “Struggles can be lost or end in compromise—but in any case, they create valuable experiences for the future [i.e., defeats!!] that we urgently need for the coming struggles. Because the next factory closure, the next bad year, will come—and the corporate bosses will again try to shift their crisis onto our backs.” This defeatism and pessimism resembles a rabbit staring down the barrel of a gun.

At the same time, waves of plant closures continue in North Hesse. Continental is closing its sites in Wetzlar and Schwalbach/Taunus, following the earlier closures of its facilities in Karben and Babenhausen. The Lollar iron foundry near Giessen is also being closed. The Daimler truck plant in Kassel, with 2,700 jobs, and VW auto production in Baunatal, with 16,000, are also under threat. Tyre manufacturer Goodyear in Fulda is also being shut down, as is the Bayer company in Frankfurt-Höchst.

The justifications put forward for the closures, which the trade union bureaucrats accept, are the same everywhere: low-wage competition, rising energy prices, Trump’s tariffs, etc. This obscures the deeper reasons: the brutal capitalist logic of maximising profits and the fact that the gap between rich and poor is constantly widening because a super-rich elite is clinging to its own privileges. This class of shareholders, board members and their clientele, most

of whom in western Germany are based in the nearby Frankfurt banking district and the affluent Taunus area, will stop at nothing to get what they want.

For the working population, this means factory closures, layoffs, precarious employment, casual work, falling real wages and child poverty. According to a survey conducted before Christmas by the German Joint Welfare Association, almost a quarter of the population of Hesse (23.7 percent) lives in poverty when housing costs are taken into account. That is around one and a half million people, many of them in northern and central Hesse.

In this situation, it is high time to take action and take up the fight for every job and against plant closures, layoffs, wage cuts and the government’s war policy. This can only be achieved by setting up rank-and-file action committees, in opposition to the bureaucrats of IG Metall and the other unions, which are deeply entrenched in established political circles and business. Through committees, workers can unite with colleagues in other companies, industries and countries to pose the question: Who controls production?

This is ultimately a political question, and for this, workers need their own party. The establishment of democratically organised action committees will immediately meet with furious resistance from all of the mainstream parties—from the far right Alternative for Germany AfD to the Left Party. The Sozialistischer Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) call for the fight against war, fascism and social cuts to be taken up in the struggle for a socialist and international perspective.



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