

Bosch in Germany: IG Metal trade union cracks down on opposition workers

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Ten thousand employees demonstrated in front of Bosch headquarters in Gerlingen near Stuttgart against the destruction of 22,000 jobs

The struggle against the IG Metall apparatus is coming to a head at the Bosch auto supplier plant in Schwäbisch Gmünd. Last year, around 200 employees—mainly from production—organised themselves against the IGM-led works council under Claudio Bellomo because they were not prepared to accept the negotiated job cuts. They drew up their own alternative list for the works council election. IG Metall and the works council have responded by using all means possible to prevent the list from participating in the election on March 11.

A first hearing on the matter took place on Tuesday, March 3, at the labour court in Aalen. Mustafa Simsek, himself a works council member who heads the 89-candidate “Freie Metaller “ (Free Metalworkers) list, had filed an urgent application with the labour court to force the list to be admitted to the election.

This is because the election committee hand-picked by IG Metall and chaired by long-standing works council member Hakan Birlik claims that the “Freie Metaller” made formal errors in their list of candidates, which could not be completely rectified—even after reworking.

The “Freie Metaller” list enjoys strong support at the plant. It has quickly put together the largest list of candidates and has good prospects of winning the works council election. That is precisely why the union is doing all it can to ban the list’s participation.

Together with the plant management, the IGM apparatus is trying to intimidate the opposition production workers and trainees who are accused of “disturbing industrial peace” because they are resisting the works council and Bosch management selling off their jobs behind closed doors.

We have received reports that candidates are being pressured in one-on-one meetings by works council

members, the Birlik election committee and even supervisors, in order to nip the opposition in the bud. List leader Mustafa Simsek was urged to come to a staff meeting without being told the reason for the meeting, even when he asked. Only when he insisted on having the meeting in the presence of a solicitor was it cancelled at short notice.

With these gangster methods, the IGM mafia wants to silence anyone who does not prostitute themselves to the corporate management as they themselves do. This must not be allowed under any circumstances. The works councils of IG Metall must not be allowed to decide at their own discretion who is allowed to stand as a candidate and who is not.

We call on all colleagues at Bosch and other auto and supplier companies to vehemently oppose this attack. Defend the right of the “Freie Metaller” list to participate in the works council election and thus the right of all employees to decide for themselves who should represent them on the works council!

To achieve this, workers must organise themselves independently of the IG Metall apparatus. Use the form below to sign up to help build an independent action committee at Bosch. Such an action committee must revoke the mandate of the works council and its election committee in Schwäbisch Gmünd. It must forbid them from speaking for the workforce or conducting elections in their name, which they manipulate and falsify in order to enforce their autocratic rule against the workforce.

At the same time, the action committee must begin to expand the struggle to defend jobs. Things are boiling over in Schwäbisch Gmünd. The works council, which is dominated by IG Metall, has sided with management and is organising the cuts itself: it has worked out a plan to gradually reduce the workforce from around 3,450 jobs today to 2,850 by 2027.

Now, IG Metall and the works council have signed off

on the elimination of a further 1,150 jobs. Bosch had previously demanded the elimination of 1,300 jobs. Plant II is being closed and the production of truck steering systems is being relocated to Maklár in Hungary. Now, absurdly, IG Metall declares this betrayal has “rescued” 150 jobs!

Defending jobs in Schwäbisch Gmünd is so important because this spectacle is not limited to Schwäbisch Gmünd. The same rigged game is being played out in one factory after another: Local management demands massive job cuts, IG Metall and the works council protest meekly and negotiate “hard,” only to then sell the reduction of a slightly smaller number of jobs as “acceptable,” “securing the location” or even as a “rescue.”

This is how Thorsten Dietter, chairman of the works council at the Bosch plant in Reutlingen, explained it: “We negotiated hard for several months and were able to reduce the originally planned job cuts by 150.” Not 1,100, but “only” 950 of the nearly 10,000 jobs will be cut. In Bosch’s Cross-Domain Computing Solutions division, “only” about 1,500 jobs will be cut in Germany instead of the 1,850 originally announced.

The plant in Waiblingen, which employs 560 people, will be closed down completely. Three hundred forty employees are to be forced to leave their jobs through a social plan, while 220 will be transferred to locations in Feuerbach, the greater Stuttgart area and Bamberg. Works council member Stefano Mazzei smugly declares: “All in all, this negotiation result is acceptable under the current economic conditions.”

The trade union apparatus is preventing the workforce from effectively fighting against the destruction of their jobs and livelihoods by dividing them plant to plant. The IGM apparatus and its works councils seek to enable Bosch to destroy 22,000 jobs, as announced last September, and implement the largest cutbacks in the company’s history.

The IGM works councils at Bosch in Schwäbisch Gmünd are not “black sheep.” They are representative of hundreds of thousands of trade union bureaucrats who have tied their privileges and their entire existence nationwide and across industries most closely to big business interests and the government. They view “their” companies and the status quo from the standpoint of profit maximisation.

That is why they support their corporations’ trade war and take responsibility for passing on the costs to the workforce. And that is why they support the rearmament

programme of the federal government under Chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU) and the passing on of the costs to workers. IGM chair Christiane Benner recently announced her full support for the government’s war policy.

Last year, IG Metall organised numerous demonstrations and rallies calling for support for German companies in the trade war and advocating the conversion of production to a war economy. Now, with state elections coming up in Baden-Württemberg, where nearly 400,000 people work in the auto and supplier industries, the union officials are worried that growing opposition to job cuts and social cuts could shake up the whole system.

Together with the United Services Union Verdi, IG Metall called a rally on Saturday, February 28. In their joint appeal under the slogan “Red alert! Enough is enough!”, they called for support from companies and state parliament parties. Specifically, they are demanding “an active industrial policy that secures jobs” and “reliable financial resources for local authorities.”

This is absurd. In reality, IG Metall supports an industrial policy that is destroying thousands of jobs every month. Meanwhile, the Verdi public service union is ensuring that the £1 trillion for armament and war is saved at the expense of the welfare state, public services and the civil service.

The purpose of last Saturday’s day of action is clear: to campaign for the state’s mainstream political parties and support industry in the trade war. The trade unions are now workers’ organisations in name only. What is needed, therefore, are new forms of organisation, action committees, on a new basis: operating independently of IG Metall and all other trade union apparatuses, internationally networked to overcome division, and opposed to the profit logic of the big corporations and the government’s war policy.

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