

Works council blackmails Bosch workers in Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany

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Following a factory meeting last week, Bosch workers at the plant in Schwäbisch Gmünd reported that works council chairman Andreas Reimer had told them everyone must now “work hard” if they did not want to lose their jobs.

The works council under Claudio Bellomo, Reimer’s predecessor and sidekick, together with top management have already destroyed almost 1,900 of the 3,450 jobs at the plant. Now it is demanding that all those remaining submit to their fate. That was the only way to remain “competitive” and prevent further job cuts and the relocation of the plant, they say.

There is a word for this, “blackmail”. The IG Metall union apparatus and its works council reps have made it their main task to ensure all the company’s attacks are enforced and the last drop is squeezed from the workforce to increase Bosch’s profits.

We know what is at stake. The works council acts as the extended arm of the corporation and exerts enormous pressure on the workforce. Anyone who complains—threaten Reimer and Co.—risks losing their severance pay. Unless everyone falls into line and allows themselves to be exploited to the bone, Bosch will shut up shop. One after another, workers are being worn down and forced to give up their job by accepting severance pay. The workforce must and can only defend itself against this collectively. And that is possible.

Reimer knows this perfectly well. That is why he and Heike Madan, senior representative of IG Metall Ostalb, implored workers not to let themselves be influenced by the “press and leaflets”. He claimed that reporting by the *World Socialist Web Site* did not correspond to the truth, was at “tabloid level” and should not be paid any further attention. That is of course a lie. In reality, he does not agree with the

WSWS offering a perspective and proposing concrete steps on how workers can defend their jobs, wages and the plant itself. He has made it his task to enforce all the attacks against the workforce on behalf of the corporate owners.

When Reimer speaks of “competitiveness” that must be guaranteed, he means jobs gone, wages down, work pace up, profits secured.

Employment has never been secured by workers accepting cuts. The path to every plant closure is paved with concessions signed by trade union and works council functionaries at the expense of the workforce. This was the case at Opel in Bochum, at Ford in Saarlouis and now at Bosch in Waiblingen.

The countless future and employment “security agreements” never had anything to do with the future, employment security or competitiveness. They established the mechanisms by which the jobs massacre and plant closures are enforced—severance payments, partial retirement rules, transfer companies, “social plans”.

At Bosch in Schwäbisch Gmünd, gradual wage cuts have been enforced for years. The agreed pay supplement there has been offset against every new contract increase and thereby melted away just like the team bonus, above-contract bonuses for weekend work, overtime etc. Now anniversary bonuses have also been cancelled. Overall, a production worker at Bosch has lost at least €1,000 to €1,500 gross salary in recent years.

For salaried employees, reductions in working hours without wage compensation apply, from 40 to 35 and from 35 to 33.5 hours a week.

Now, works council boss Reimer is announcing new attacks. The basis for this has already been laid. The latest “collective agreement for employment security”

in the state of Baden-Württemberg, concluded by the IG Metall and the Südwestmetall employers' association on November 12, 2024, lists over almost 30 pages on how wages can be reduced through working time reductions without wage compensation.

Furthermore, IG Metall allows individual companies and works councils to deviate “from contract minimum standards”, for example, “through reduction of special payments, deferral of claims”. Working hours can also be further reduced to up to 30 or even 28 hours—in the event of “temporary employment problems”.

The “Trafobaustein”—supplementary “transformation money” introduced in 2021 in the metal working industries and paid out once a year at 18.4 percent of monthly wage—is still being paid at Bosch in Schwäbisch Gmünd. However, “If the net return on sales is below 2.3 percent or if it would fall below 2.3 percent if the Trafobaustein were paid out, the employer can cancel the claim by simple declaration,” the IG Metall has decreed.

The works council and management are currently hatching such an attack. After Bosch lost a promising order from VW for the development and construction of wireless steering systems, Bosch management can now announce “temporary employment problems” at any time—even if plant manager Michael Zink and his commercial plant manager Sascha Motz offered reassurances at the factory meeting and held out the prospect of future orders.

Reimer and Co. will justify all these attacks by saying they are securing “competitiveness”. But what does it mean in concrete terms if the workforce in Schwäbisch Gmünd “works hard” to secure Bosch’s profits? It means that the workforce at other locations have to work even harder to secure “competitiveness”—i.e., corporate profits.

The works council in Feuerbach will argue exactly the same way. Thus, the works council reps set in motion a spiral of job cuts, wage reductions and work speed-ups whose only losers are the workers. The workforce in one location is played off against another; the profiteers are the corporate owners.

There is a remedy against this division organised by the union and works council apparatus: Solidarity, the unification of the various workforces, not only at Bosch and not only in Germany.

It is a false hope to believe that the job and social

cuts, the wage reductions and price increases will simply come to an end at some point. The jobs massacre initiated at Bosch is a result of the worldwide crisis of the capitalist system. The bitter struggle for sales markets and raw materials has once again, as in the First and Second World Wars, taken the form of violent military conflicts. This is the reason for the wars that the US and the European powers are waging against Russia and against Iran and their preparations for war against China.

All this is not about “freedom” or “democracy”. These principles have themselves become the targets of the respective governments in the US and Europe. It is about the redivision of the world among the major powers. It is workers and their families who are supposed to bear the costs of this madness.

The next factory meeting is scheduled to take place in two months, which would then be the third this year. Bosch workers should be forearmed; if they do not fight back now, the plant will be closed sooner or later.

Not everyone will then have the opportunity—like Claudio Bellomo this summer—to retire at the age of just 60. The deputy works council chairman’s early retirement is being further sweetened with a “golden handshake”, while his colleagues live in worry.

In order to stand up for their interests, Bosch workers in Schwäbisch Gmünd must organise independently, build a rank-and-file action committee and ally with fellow Bosch workers in Feuerbach, Waiblingen, Reutlingen, as well as in Bursa, Turkey, Maklár, Hungary, the US and China.

We urgently call on all Bosch employees to stop watching as Reimer and Co. destroy the livelihoods of thousands of working-class families. Become active now, message us via WhatsApp or Signal at +491633378340 or simply call. We guarantee you absolute anonymity.



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