

# Prevent closure, defend every job at the Zalando logistics hub in Erfurt, Germany!

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At the beginning of the year, Zalando announced that it would close its logistics centre near Erfurt, Germany by September 2026, eliminating around 2,700 jobs. The company, one of Germany's largest online fashion retailers, justified the mass layoff by citing a "reorientation" of its Europe-wide logistics network following last year's takeover of the online fashion retailer About You.

The next meetings of the internal conciliation board are scheduled for July 7 and 9. At these meetings, management and the works council are to decide the fate of the affected workforce. The works council and the Verdi union have agreed to this conciliation process, thereby paving the way for the closure of the Erfurt site. Unless Zalando workers intervene independently, the negotiations will be limited to winding down operations, the scope of the restructuring and a so-called "social plan" covering severance and related measures. The jobs would be lost forever.

It is not too late to organise resistance! Take the fight into your own hands now and organise yourselves in independent rank-and-file action committees! Wrest control of the negotiations from Verdi and initiate industrial action!

Verdi initially expressed outrage, denouncing the "ugly face of capitalism" and appealing to Zalando to "talk to the works council and union about ways to secure the site's future." From the outset, however, the Verdi apparatus never seriously considered the unconditional defence of all jobs. This is clear from the fact that it quickly made a "social plan"—that is, severance packages—its priority, while strictly refusing to call effective industrial action to defend every job.

As always in such cases, when the livelihoods of thousands of workers and their families are at stake, the unions appeal to "politicians"—in this case, the Thuringia state government. With its "Taskforce Zalando," the state government has already ensured that the Federal Employment Agency opens an office directly at the site and has promised funds for "retraining measures."

This is the mechanism through which masses of jobs have been permanently destroyed in recent years. It would be better described as a conveyor belt into unemployment. Everyone in Thuringia knows that comparable alternative jobs will never be created again.

The works council's legal challenges to management's surprise closure plans had some justification. But they could not replace an effective defence campaign by the workforce aimed at bringing the corporation to its knees. After the Erfurt Labour Court, at the request of the online fashion retailer, ordered the convening of a conciliation board, the Erfurt works council appealed to the State Labour Court, but reached a settlement at the end of May.

Instead of fighting, the Verdi works council held "face-to-face talks" with management, which proved fruitless. After nine negotiating sessions in three weeks and "many concessions" by the Verdi works council, the conciliation board was invoked. The first of four meetings took place on June 23. The court-appointed chair of the conciliation board is Josef Molkenbur, a former judge and former justice minister from the Christian

Democratic Union, Germany's main conservative party.

Verdi and the works council, as they themselves admit, made "far-reaching concessions" in all talks. Nevertheless, Zalando categorically rejected a "fair social plan" with "appropriate severance payments." There is no information whatsoever about the contents of these talks, above all about what concessions the works council has already made. In the meantime, almost a quarter of the workforce has already left as their temporary contracts expired, leaving only about 2,100 employees in Erfurt.

## The workforce must take the fight into its own hands

This painful experience underscores that the workers can only lose through this approach. Tens of thousands in the automotive, supplier and metal industries alone, have lost their jobs in recent months after the unions and their works council reps first made endless concessions and then sealed the end with social plans. There is not a single case in which there was a strike to enforce demands, an occupation of the premises, or calls for serious solidarity actions.

There is a compelling conclusion to be drawn from this: Workers must take the fight against the closure of the Zalando logistics centre in Erfurt into their own hands. This urgently requires the formation of an independent action committee, made up of trusted colleagues who are prepared to lead the fight uncompromisingly. The Verdi apparatus must be stripped of its control.

This requires a break with the "social partnership" between Verdi, the works council and management, which makes the defence of all jobs impossible. General assemblies must be convened immediately, and an independent action committee elected that acts according to the democratic decisions of the workforce, not the directives of the union bureaucracy. The demand must be: unconditional defence of all jobs, not a single dismissal, and no social plans disguised as severance settlements.

If management does not give way, the action committee must prepare strikes, blockades and, if necessary, the occupation of the site. The six strikes of the past year have proven the fighting strength of the workforce. This strength must now be used to secure the jobs themselves.

The works council and Verdi are right to criticise the cynicism of Zalando management, which justifies its refusal to make concessions by claiming money is tight. Yet Zalando can spend a billion euros on the purchase of About You, €300 million on share buybacks and €65 million on sponsoring the Deutscher Fußball-Bund (German Football Association). But the denunciations by Verdi and the works council are only meant to conceal their own capitulation.

Zalando management quite obviously has nothing in mind but the ruthless increase of profits at the workers' expense. It is no coincidence

that the company is closing the Erfurt warehouse only a few years after €22 million in state subsidies expired, while at the same time opening a brand-new logistics hub near Giessen.

All this comes despite a 16.8 percent increase in sales to €12.35 billion and a net profit of €215.1 million in the 2025 financial year. Zalando management clearly has no interest in “respect,” “fairness” or any of the other phrases Verdi and the works council trot out from the dusty repertoire of “social partnership.” Rather, the DAX-listed corporation is following the general trend of mass layoffs and a top-down assault on jobs to further increase profits.

The fact that the Erfurt site, which opened in 2012, is now falling victim to the new distribution centre in Giessen follows the familiar logic of staff cuts. According to Zalando, Giessen will “naturally have a completely different level of automation than Erfurt” and orders can be processed and shipped “much faster.”

Unlike in Erfurt, Zalando is not constructing a new facility in Giessen, but using a former US Army building. There, it promises a maximum of 1,700 jobs. Giessen’s mayor, Frank-Tilo Becher of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), welcomed this as providing “new impetus for the economy,” more revenue from trade tax and the “hope that it will become a stable factor here.”

## Warm words

In public, the Zalando workers from Erfurt receive plenty of warm words, from Thuringia State Premier Mario Voigt of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and his labour minister, Katharina Schenk of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), to former State Premier Bodo Ramelow of the Left Party, who advises the Zalando works council. At the recent Left Party conference in Potsdam, three works council members from Erfurt even made a guest appearance. Repeated reference is also made to Zalando’s far-reaching role as the third-largest employer in the structurally weak region around Erfurt.

For all the pithy words against Zalando, however, the essential questions are ignored:

- Who is responsible for the deindustrialisation and mass unemployment in East Germany after 1990, and then used this crisis to lure large corporations like Zalando to the region with state subsidies?
- Who paved the way for companies like Zalando with low wages, fixed-term employment contracts, and relentless speed-ups?
- Who continues to support all this unconditionally in the name of “competitiveness”?
- And who, following the same logic, supports the federal government’s trade and war policies?

The answer to these questions is: the union bureaucracy and its associated parties, the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party, which emerged from the Stalinist state party in the former East Germany. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is exploiting the closure plans for its vile xenophobic agitation against the allegedly high proportion of migrant workers and the supposed failings of the “welfare state.”

Especially under Bodo Ramelow’s Left Party state government, which held office from 2014 to 2024, thousands of jobs were destroyed. To name just a few examples: SolarWorld Arnstadt, Bosch Arnstadt, Bosch Eisenach and Opel Eisenach. Behind every cut stood the signature of IG Metall or other unions, which acted as henchmen for the companies and worked closely with Ramelow.

Workers and their families are currently confronted with enormous attacks on all fronts. The German automotive industry alone is in the process of destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs, and the federal and

state governments are imposing massive cuts in every area. The only exception is the reinforcing of the state apparatus, both at home and abroad.

Unions like Verdi and their associated works councils stand reliably on the side of the ruling elites. The cuts in the automotive and supplier industries bear the signature of IG Metall. Collective agreements in these industries and in the public sector, which fail to keep pace with rising costs, bear the signatures of IG Metall, Verdi, the education union GEW, the train drivers’ union GDL and other unions. The last German Confederation of Trade Unions congress supported the federal government’s rearmament and war agenda and the expansion of the arms industry was praised as an “opportunity.”

This complicity is also evident at Zalando. While Verdi last year called six limited protest strikes, most recently on December 18, to enforce recognition of the industry-wide collective agreements for retail and mail order, there has not been a single strike against the plant closure this entire year. Instead, there have only been ridiculous short protest rallies and letter-writing campaigns.

## Build independent action committees!

The fight to defend jobs cannot be waged on a regional basis. Zalando is pitting Erfurt against Giessen, Germany against the Netherlands, Poland and Italy. The answer is the organised unity of all workers across all sites and national borders, including the employees of external service providers whose contracts are also being terminated.

Zalando has also casually announced the closure of three other sites outside Germany, most of which are operated by external partners. However, the group has not disclosed which three sites are affected. Zalando operates other logistics centres, that is, warehouses and distribution centres, in Italy, Poland, France and Sweden, among other countries. The largest is in Rotterdam, Netherlands. There is every reason to suspect that Zalando, in league with Verdi, is deliberately concealing which sites are on the hit list in order to divide the workforces of the four affected sites and prevent joint resistance.

The allies of the Zalando employees in Erfurt are not the politicians from the CDU, SPD and Left Party, who subsidised Zalando with €22 million and are now shedding crocodile tears. Their allies are their colleagues at the other sites and workers at Amazon, DHL, UPS, Hermes, Otto-Versand and throughout the logistics industry.

The Erfurt closure is not an isolated case, but a result of the capitalist profit system. Instead of accepting the dictates of the DAX corporation for ever greater profits, the interests of workers and their families must be defended unconditionally. Automation must not serve as a weapon for layoffs. It must benefit employees through reduced working hours with no loss of wages.

The action committee, which must be built in Erfurt and throughout Zalando, must defend all jobs at all sites as a matter of principle. It must fundamentally reject concessions on wages, pensions and working conditions. It is not the maximisation of company profits, but the struggle itself that will decide whether jobs are preserved. Workers’ livelihoods and their very survival take precedence over the profit interests of the owners, shareholders, banks and hedge funds that can never get enough.

The Erfurt action committee must join the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and make the struggle part of a global counteroffensive of the working class.

The time has come to take your destiny into your own hands. Contact us to begin building action committees. Message us via WhatsApp on +49 163 337 8340 or fill out the form directly below the article. We assure you

of absolute confidentiality.



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