Schaeffler destroys 3,460 jobs across Europe—IG Metall union submits workforce to the axe

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On November 3, precision bearing manufacturer Schaeffler AG announced the elimination of 3,460 jobs in Europe, 2,660 of them in Germany. Measured against the core workforce of 31,957 employees, this will destroy around 9 percent of jobs by 2028. Including the cuts resulting from earlier programmes and the 1,800 partial retirement contracts already signed, the share leaps to around 18 percent.

While the company bleeds the workforce dry, the Schaeffler family cashes in. For the 2025 financial year alone, a hefty €224 million in dividends went to the family. The cuts are not an "unavoidable constraint" but the result of the owners' unrestrained greed for profit—and the IG Metall union is not the opponent of this attack but its willing enforcer.

The job cuts now announced are the latest link in a chain of mass slashing that has stretched over years. Under the "Efficiency Programme 2020," launched during the coronavirus pandemic, Schaeffler destroyed 4,400 jobs across Europe, 3,300 of them in Germany, and closed the plants in Steinhagen and Hameln.

Between 2021 and 2023, a further 2,000 jobs fell victim to "Agenda 4 plus One." The merger with Vitesco Technologies Group AG in 2024 cost 2,800 jobs. As recently as November 2024, Schaeffler had announced that it would cut around 2,800 jobs in Germany alone. Now, once again on the backs of the workforce, the company will cut 3,460 more.

The current programme hits production hardest. Around 50 percent of the cuts fall on manufacturing, 30 percent on research and development and 20 percent on other functional areas. The programme affects 16 sites in Europe, and the company plans to close five of them eventually—among them Dortmund with 430 employees and Morbach with 160, both in the Powertrain & Chassis division, which makes products for combustion engines.

Schaeffler will discontinue activities in Berlin (270 employees) and abandon the Schwalbach site, moving a large proportion of its 385 employees to Frankfurt. The company plans further cuts in Höchstadt, Erlangen, Schweinfurt, Herzogenaurach, Bühl, Nuremberg and Regensburg; at the French sites in Haguenau and Toulouse; in Skalica and Kysuce in Slovakia and in Herstal in Belgium.

The thrust is unmistakable. The combustion-engine business is being wound down. The corporate leadership and IG Metall justify this with the "transformation" of the industry to electromobility and with alleged management errors in the past. But this narrative is a smokescreen that conceals the true character of the attack.

The crisis in the auto and supplier industries is not the result of individual wrong decisions but an expression of global overcapacity and the intensified competitive struggle between transnational corporations, which is erupting in the trade war between the US, Europe and China. The EU has imposed import tariffs on Chinese electric cars; the US under Trump has imposed tariffs on the entire auto industry—and German corporations are responding by ruthlessly shifting the costs of the crisis onto their workforces.

Schaeffler is not an isolated case. Employers in the metal industry alone have cut 350,000 jobs since 2019 and plan to cut 300,000 more in the next two years. IG Metall operates on the motto "every man dies alone" and acts as an assisted-suicide helper.

The "e-transformation" serves as a mere pretext. The corporations are using the restructuring to destroy jobs en masse and to eliminate all the social rights and gains that generations of workers fought for over decades—collective agreements, working-time regulations, continued payment of wages in sickness.

What IG Metall sells as "securing the future" is in truth a concerted attack on the working class, intended to throw workers back to the level of exploitation that prevailed before the unions were built. Workers are not paying for management's mistakes—they are paying for the owners' profits with their jobs and wages.

Alongside the job cuts, the company is introducing a so-called "solidarity contribution"—a temporary, "voluntary" salary waiver "across all levels of the [business] hierarchy." It is intended, the company says, to lower personnel costs per head and thereby reduce the "necessary job cuts." Without the solidarity contribution, the corporate announcement states bluntly, "the job cuts would have been even larger."

This is naked blackmail. The workforce is supposed to buy its way out of further layoffs with wage cuts—with the knife held at its throat. The company's claim that the executive board is also making a "solidarity contribution" is sheer mockery and cynicism. CEO Klaus Rosenfeld earned around €6.1 million in the 2025 financial year, the executive board as a whole, €24 million—up from €15 million the year before. While employees are supposed to practise "solidarity," the board helps itself shamelessly. Board salaries are rising.

With the cuts programme, the company wants to squeeze around €300 million a year out of the workforce from 2030. The company estimates the one-off cost of implementing the cuts at around €480 million and will book the bulk of it as a restructuring provision as early as 2026.

The Schaeffler family—Maria-Elisabeth Schaeffler-Thumann and her son Georg F.W. Schaeffler—controls the empire through the holding company IHO Holding and owns around 79 percent of the shares in the listed Schaeffler AG. Accordingly, the lion's share of the dividends goes directly into the family's pockets.

For the 2024 financial year, the company paid out between €230 million and €240 million at a dividend of €0.25 per share, of which around €185 million went to the family. For 2025, the total payout in April 2026 came to around €283.5 million, of which around €224 million went to the family.

The Schaeffler family's wealth is nothing but the unpaid product of

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workers' own labour, extracted from them. While workers fear for every job and every euro, one thing goes without saying for the family: the dividend takes absolute priority—over every job, every plant, every human being.

Schaeffler AG likes to present itself as a "family business." But its foundations were laid under the Nazis—based on plunder, forced labour and war. For a long time, the official founding of Industrie GmbH (later INA) in 1946 in Herzogenaurach was regarded as the "zero hour," the moment Nazi Germany collapsed. But a study by the historian Gregor Schöllgen, commissioned by the Schaeffler family itself in 2009, revealed the deep entanglement with the Nazis.

The cornerstone was "Aryanisation," the plundering of Jewish property. In 1940, the company's co-founder, Wilhelm Schaeffler, acquired Davistan AG in Katscher in Upper Silesia—today Kietrz in Poland—a formerly Jewish textile and carpet factory whose owner, Ernst Frank, had been forced to flee the Nazis. Schaeffler snapped up the heavily indebted business from the administering creditor banks at well below its value.

Wilhelm Schaeffler and his brother Georg joined the Nazi Party (NSDAP) around 1938–40. From the summer of 1943, they consolidated the booming military equipment business in the newly founded Wilhelm Schaeffler KG; the plants produced bomb-release mechanisms for the Luftwaffe, incendiary bombs, Wehrmacht (army) uniforms and needle bearings for tanks and military vehicles.

To keep up war production, Schaeffler exploited hundreds of forced labourers in Katscher, mainly from France, the Soviet Union and Poland; the Polish workers were interned under harsh conditions in the local "Polenlager 92" (Poles' camp 92).

With the Red Army advancing, the family evacuated machinery and materials in 40 railway wagons to Upper Franconia in early 1945. After the end of the war, Wilhelm Schaeffler was extradited to Poland and sentenced to a multi-year prison term for his economic activities in the occupied territory. His brother Georg used the rescued machinery to lay the foundation in Herzogenaurach for today's global corporation.

This history is not a moral footnote. It reveals the true nature of capitalism. Profits were and are made at the expense of the working class—if necessary, over dead bodies, with war and forced labour.

Today, Schaeffler is once again deeply involved in the arms business—in the midst of the biggest wave of rearmament since the Second World War. At the end of 2025, the company founded its own arms division, "Defence & New Space," and in mid-2026 appointed a separate CEO for it. Group CEO Rosenfeld wants to generate around €1 billion in sales from arms and war in this sector in the medium term.

In June 2026, Schaeffler entered into a strategic partnership with the French drone manufacturer Delair to build up mass production of military combat and interceptor drones—up to 100 drones a day are to roll off the line.

At the end of 2025, the company agreed to closer cooperation with the Munich-based AI arms company Helsing, for which Schaeffler is to take on automated large-scale series production of military equipment as an industrialisation partner. Previously, its business had been limited to "dual-use" precision bearings for military aircraft and helicopters, including for the US Army.

This conversion to arms production is part of German rearmament and the escalation of NATO's war against Russia. NATO is waging de facto war against Russia and, with eyes wide open, is risking nuclear catastrophe; German industry is switching its civilian capacities to war production. As under the Nazis, the auto and supplier industries are being harnessed for arms manufacture. Workers are to build the weapons for a war that is directed against their own interests—and whose victims they will be. The working class can take no side in this war. The answer is the international unity of the workers of Russia, Ukraine and Germany against their own ruling classes.

IG Metall's response to the attack at Schaeffler is a criminal betrayal. In the middle of collective bargaining, the union agreed to the job and wage cuts behind the workforce's back and behind closed doors. The corporate announcement itself reveals this: the "solidarity contribution" is "still to be agreed with the relevant bodies"—so the agreement was already reached before the workforce was even informed.

Outwardly, the group works council stages theatrical outrage. Its chairman, Uli Schoepplein, criticises the programme for lacking "precisely the creativity we need in view of the crisis" and calls for a "resilient industrial concept for the future." But he does not demand a single measure that would stop the cuts. That is the classic role of the works council bureaucracy: feigning outrage while co-managing and enforcing the cuts.

Instead of uniting workers internationally, IG Metall preaches nationalism. It demands protectionism and defends "Germany as a business location"—that is, the profits of German corporations in the competition over trade and arms. IG Metall has backed the war credits and the federal government's rearmament programme, worth trillions of euros; its "Day of Action" was a nationalist spectacle in support of the government's war course. The union apparatus is financially dependent on the corporations—through member bonuses, supervisory board seats and corporate contributions—and has co-signed the job cuts at VW, Mercedes, Bosch, ZF and Schaeffler. It cannot be reformed "from within" or be "pushed to the left."

The attack at Schaeffler is part of a concerted attack on the entire metal and electrical industries—combined with rearmament, social cuts and preparations for war. The warning strikes of recent days, in which tens of thousands of metalworkers at more than 2,000 workplaces took part, show their readiness to fight. But IG Metall is systematically channelling and smothering this anger in order to prevent a wildfire—in the interests of the corporations.

That is why workers must now build independent rank-and-file action committees—elected by the workers themselves, accountable to the workforce and free of full-time union officials and works council barons. These committees must lead the fight to stop all layoffs and plant closures, for full compensation for inflation, against every wage cut—including the so-called "solidarity contribution"—and against the switch to war production.

Workers have the power to stop the attack. What they lack is a leadership that does not betray the struggle—as IG Metall does every day. All those who seriously want to defend their jobs and wages should contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP).

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