

IG Metall agrees to 3,500 job cuts at MAN Truck & Bus in Germany and Austria

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The IG Metall trade union has agreed to the destruction of 3,500 jobs at truck and bus manufacturer MAN in Germany and Austria. Further job cuts at the Volkswagen subsidiary are already planned. The company employs 36,000 worldwide.

On Tuesday, the executive boards of MAN SE and MAN Truck & Bus SE, together with representatives of the union and the works council, signed a “key points paper” that is intended to achieve an “improvement in earnings of up to €1.7 billion,” not least through job cuts.

Hardest hit are the plants in Steyr, Austria, with 2,200 jobs, and Plauen, Germany, with 150 jobs. The Steyr plant is to be sold and the Plauen site closed. Workers in Plauen have been offered new jobs at the VW plant in Zwickau, 52 km away. A plant closure could be decided as early as the first half of 2021, IG Metall Zwickau leader Thomas Knabel told the press.

IG Metall stresses that it has been possible to avert the 9,500 redundancies originally announced in the group’s strategy paper and reduce them to 3,500 jobs cut.

First, this is a well-known ruse of the trade unions. Corporations announce a high number of jobs to be cut so that the ultimately lower number can then be presented as a “success” by the unions. Second, even the figures mentioned are a smokescreen to hide the facts from the workforce.

The figure of 9,500 also included international locations and numerous temporary workers have already left in recent months because their contracts were simply not renewed. A few months ago, there were 4,000 workers at the Nuremberg plant. Currently, there are 3,600 workers, and by the end of 2022, there will only be 3,100. The 400 temporary workers who have left the company are not included in the reduction

figures.

- In Salzgitter, 1,900 regular employees are to remain at the end of 2022 out of around 2,400 jobs at present, a reduction of 20 percent. “A reasonable amount,” as the IG Metall deputy secretary in Salzgitter-Peine Brigitte Runge puts it.

- In Munich and Dachau, according to the agreement, only 7,500 of the current 9,000 jobs will be occupied at the end of 2022. It is to remain the main production plant for trucks, with cab outfitting and assembly.

- The Nuremberg site is to develop drive technologies in the future. The workforce there is to shrink from 3,700 to 3,100 jobs.

- In Wittich, only 60 permanent employees are to remain.

These are some of the reduced numbers that IG Metall wants to claim as a “victory.” At the same time, however, it is preparing further cuts in upcoming negotiations, which are being kept confidential.

“The contents of this key points paper are to be implemented with a future collective agreement as well as in factory-level agreements,” the group’s press release says. The word “future collective agreement” should set alarm bells ringing for all workers—because IG Metall always takes this to mean job and wage cuts and a deterioration of working conditions. Supposedly, this is to ensure competitiveness and so save the production locations. The opposite is the case; these future collective agreements pave the way for the gradual closure of entire plants and locations.

What the now-agreed key points paper—the saving of €1.7 billion—means in concrete terms can only be guessed at from the announcement of the agreement:

- €550 million are to be saved in “material and personnel costs” in the group. What this means for working conditions and pay will only become clear in

the forthcoming negotiations, but nothing good can be expected.

- €700 million are to be saved through the supply chain, i.e., job cuts and wage reductions for those working there.

- €450 million are to be “earned” in additional “distribution services.” Here, too, there is nothing concrete known.

Another hackneyed ritual is the threat of compulsory redundancies. As usual, the MAN group threatened this, and the works councils and trade unions were “up in arms” against it, only to finally agree to the cutbacks by other methods. This time was no exception. Saki Stimoniaris, chairman of the general works council and a member of the company’s supervisory board, had initiated labour court proceedings in September last year against the redundancies announced by the executive board. A “location and employment safeguard” from 2016, which excluded them, was valid until the end of 2030.

Like all such agreements, they are not worth the paper they are written on. Such agreements are only valid if they are not needed by the workers because the profits are flowing. But as soon as the profits dry up and the workers need a guarantee of employment and location, this is no longer the case.

The 2016 agreement on safeguarding jobs at MAN also contains a “right of termination,” known as the “bad weather clause.” This allows for dismissals for operational reasons if sales slump by 40 percent. Before the labour court, the company cited the slump in sales during the coronavirus pandemic and the European Union’s stricter CO2 regulations, which have been in force since 2019. The cutbacks were already on the horizon even before the pandemic, because the group did not achieve its targeted return on sales.

Proceedings in the labour court over the compulsory redundancies are still ongoing, with a verdict not expected until the summer. After Tuesday’s agreement, however, MAN works council head Stimoniaris was already proudly rejoicing. “We take responsibility for our MAN.” The “secret of the success of this proud company,” he said, was that the group could always rely on each individual.

Stimoniaris’ reliability in 2019 cost the MAN Group almost half a million euros, with this functionary pocketing exactly €482,040 for his work on the

supervisory board.

After the group announced last year that it would cut 9,500 jobs, the leaders of IG Metall and the VW group immediately stepped in to find a mechanism to quell the anger in the ranks of the workforce.

This was the role played by the key points paper, which involved not only the MAN works council and the executive board of MAN Truck & Bus, but also Jürgen Kerner from the IG Metall executive board (who is also deputy chairman on the MAN supervisory board), Gunnar Kilian, the VW personnel director appointed by IG Metall, and Matthias Gründler, the chairman of MAN’s parent company Traton. All participants agreed from the beginning that workers’ livelihoods had to be subordinated to the strategic corporate goal of achieving an operating return of 8 percent on sales.

Workers can only defend their jobs and wages through a united, independent movement that opposes the capitalist system, which always subordinates workers’ interests to shareholders’ greed for profit. This movement must include colleagues in all international factories. For example, MAN has factories in Krakow, Poland (opened in 2007, with 580 workers) and Starachowice (in the MAN group since 1999, with 3,000 workers), to which production is now to be partially transferred.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) advocates building action committees that are completely independent of the trade unions and take the defence of jobs into their own hands, networking nationwide and internationally. We call on all MAN workers to join the SGP and build an international, socialist party.



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