

Thousands more jobs to be destroyed at Ford Cologne

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Another jobs massacre is looming at Ford's headquarters in Cologne. In the last five years, four "restructuring measures" have already cost 7,000 jobs. On Tuesday morning, Works Council head Benjamin Gruschka announced the next job destruction programme at a plant meeting.

Gruschka did not provide any figures, but all Ford workers immediately realised that several thousand jobs were at stake here. Ford currently has just under 13,000 employees in Cologne, less than 4,000 of whom work in production.

Works Council Chairman Gruschka named five points that management had communicated to him. The first is described as a reduction in "bureaucracy," a synonym for the dismissal of lower and middle management employees.

Points two and three cover the areas of administration, marketing, sales and services, as well as product development. The reduction of 2,300 employees was announced only last year, particularly at the European and international development centre in Cologne-Merkenich. Around 1,700 of the original 3,600 employees there are to leave the company by 2026. Although none of the 1,700 have yet been forced to go, the next wave of redundancies is already rolling in.

Point four once again targets vehicle production. Although several thousand jobs have already been destroyed there with the 2019 cost-cutting programme, production of the new Explorer electric model only began a fortnight ago, six months late.

In management-speak, the impending job losses are being disguised as the "more efficient" organisation of "industrial processes" and the alignment of "structures with Ford's strategic priorities." But every worker knows what this means when, according to Ford, it includes "the review of quantities, efficiency and personnel deployment in all production areas, as well as in production-related services and components."

Point five succinctly states that Ford Europe only wants to "concentrate on its core business." Gruschka and Ford left open which areas are not part of the "core business" and will

be outsourced. Over the past two years, workers, including many from production, have taken part in training and further education programmes at Ford's expense in order to switch to other professions. It is unclear whether—contrary to the hopes of most—they will now be encouraged to look for work elsewhere.

It is just as unclear exactly how many jobs will be lost. Management intends to announce concrete figures at the end of next week. No one from the senior management attended the plant meeting on Tuesday and there was no official statement. Gruschka only reported verbally.

Several developments indicate that the announcement of the figures next week will be followed by an earthquake.

Ford Germany boss Martin Sander, who was also responsible for vehicle electrification in Europe, announced on June 6, just two days after the resumption of production, that he was leaving Ford and moving back to the VW Group. On July 1, he will take up his post at VW headquarters in Wolfsburg as board member for Marketing, Sales and Distribution.

The reaction of Gruschka indicates that he and the management are expecting to confront huge resentment. He described the new redundancy plans as a "declaration of war on the German workforce." But workers are used to such radical phrases from works council leaders. Gruschka, who is also chairman of Ford's European Works Council, will also ensure that the job cuts go smoothly in the fifth round of redundancies.

After all, how have he and his works council colleagues reacted to the company's "fighting words" in recent years? They did what management demanded—in Cologne and Saarlouis, as well in Valencia, Spain.

When 12,000 jobs were to be cut across Europe in 2019, 5,000 of them in Germany, the trade unions and works council representatives in each country backed their national management and offered to make cuts so that the redundancies would take place in another country. In this way, the company achieved exactly what it had wanted from the outset. In Germany alone, 5,400 jobs were destroyed,

4,000 in Cologne. In addition, the works council reps agreed on wage cuts and other concessions, supposedly to ensure the competitiveness of the respective production location.

The same procedure then took place in the internal bidding war between the Ford plants in Saarlouis in Saarland and Almussafes in Valencia. The head of the Saarlouis Works Council, Markus Thal, and Gruschka claimed afterwards that the German plant had lost the competition and would therefore be closed, while the Spanish plant would remain in operation.

That was a lie. In reality, the bidding war served as a mechanism to push through the long-planned closure of the Saarland plant. In Saarlouis, the IG Metall union and its Works Council reps under Thal are in the process of winding up the entire plant. From next year, only a maximum of 1,000 of the 7,000 employees will remain. Vehicle production will then be discontinued. Ford in Saarlouis will be history from 2032, when the factory gates will be closed after the shutdown work has been completed.

But the plant in Almussafes was by no means “saved.” What is now happening at the alleged “winner” of the bidding competition proves that the entire process was a set-up by the trade unions and works council reps in Germany and Spain.

Of the 9,300 employees who worked at the Spanish plant before the bidding war, only 3,200 are to remain after a third round of redundancies, which has now been planned. A further 1,600 jobs will be cut; 600 employees will have to go, while a further 1,000 are being strung along with a possible transitional solution or an option to return. They are supposed to return when the planned production of a new hybrid model starts in 2027, but this is mere speculation.

Here, too, there is a risk that the entire plant will be gradually closed. The Spanish UGT trade union (Unión General de Trabajadores) and the works council it dominates are acting no differently to IG Metall in Germany.

Gruschka and his IG Metall Works Council reps are once again trying to sow confusion among the workforce in order to prevent industrial action against the cutbacks. Gruschka said that it was “incomprehensible” that the workforce was once again being made so insecure: “Instead of concentrating on the most important job, namely [producing] the first and soon the second electric car in Cologne, and finally focussing all efforts on this, the workforce is once again being demotivated. This is a sideshow and incomprehensible!”

This statement contains as many untruths as it does words. Because as far as Ford is concerned, the “most important job” is not building the first and second electric models in Cologne and motivating the workforce, but increasing returns for the owners and shareholders. Job cuts serve this

purpose. Workers’ livelihoods are being sacrificed for the profits of the shareholders. Downsizing is not a sideshow, but the main event.

Just as the German government subordinates all social interests to its pro-war policy, slashing social spending across the board, shareholders, management, trade union bureaucrats and works council reps subordinate everything to maximising profits. The victims are the workers, who create all the social wealth that the super-rich are able to grab for themselves.

Gruschka announced on Tuesday: “We will fight, and we can fight.” When an IG Metall official or works council rep announces a “fight,” workers should take heed. This is inevitably followed by job cuts, wage reductions or even plant closures. Gruschka will organise some hollow protests, as he did last year, to dissipate the anger of Ford workers, while at the same time working out a joint approach to job cuts with management behind the backs of the workforce.

The attacks on jobs and wages at Ford in Cologne can only be fended off if workers do not allow themselves to be divided and unite with their colleagues in Saarlouis, Spain, Romania, Turkey, the UK and above all in the US.

The trade unions and their local works council reps are thwarting this and pushing through the cutbacks on behalf of their masters in the upper echelons of the company against the workforce. Ford workers must therefore organise themselves independently in rank-and-file action committees. In Saarlouis, Ford workers have begun this process. Such action committees must also be set up in Cologne and at other Ford sites.

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