

Massive job cuts at German steelmaker Thyssenkrupp: IG Metall union sides with management

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On Thursday, steelworkers from Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe (TKSE) blocked the factory gates at the Hamborn/Beeckerwerth site in the north of Duisburg. At times, the main road was also blocked with forklift trucks, wheel loaders and benches, which led to major traffic jams and hours of delays, including in tram traffic.

Workers from Hüttenwerke Krupp-Mannesmann (HKM) from the south of the city also took part in the protest action. The HKM plant is to be sold. The future of the remaining 3,000 or so employees is completely uncertain.

Production stoppages and protests also took place at several other Thyssenkrupp sites, for example in Hagen, Dortmund and Gelsenkirchen. The works council spoke of massive “guerrilla action” in the fight against the planned job cuts.

Two days earlier, the IG Metall trade union issued a dramatic appeal warning of the destruction of 10,000 jobs at Thyssenkrupp. Leaflets titled “Only half a steel works” were distributed at all locations. They state that the company’s CEO Miguel López was pursuing a “radical plan” and wanted to “halve the steel works.”

The planned reduction in production at Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe from the current level of around 11 million tonnes to 5 million tonnes would have catastrophic consequences. “Several sites would have to close,” the works council and trade union said in the leaflet. Thyssenkrupp operates steelworks not only in Duisburg, but also in Bochum, Gelsenkirchen, Dortmund, Hagen, Siegen and Finnentrop, among other locations.

The protest action on Thursday was also held under the slogan: “Someone has to stop López!” The speakers—representatives of the supervisory board, the works council, IG Metall and politicians from the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens who were present—all took aim at the CEO of the group as a whole, López, who allegedly “has no idea about steel” and was “endangering Germany as a steel-producing country.”

In contrast, the CEO of the steel division Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe (TKSE), Bernhard Osburg, was praised as “the best steel CEO we have ever had” and his “business plan” was applauded, despite its also providing for the destruction of

thousands of jobs and the closure of plants in close cooperation with the works council. Media reports quote the deputy chairman of the works council as saying: “We fully support Osburg.”

Many steelworkers are justifiably deeply concerned about their jobs and the future of their families. They are looking for a way to organise real resistance to the planned job cuts.

But the protest actions of IG Metall and the works council on Thursday and similar actions during the Thyssenkrupp supervisory board meeting next week have nothing to do with a serious fight to defend jobs. On the contrary. They are part of a stitch-up in which works council reps and IG Metall play a key role in implementing job cuts.

They sit on all the management committees, on the supervisory board and on the company economic committee, are well informed about all the plans, have often worked out the plans themselves, advise the top management, organise protests at the same time to let off steam and use their extensive apparatus to suppress any serious struggle to defend jobs and social rights.

The most important task facing workers at Thyssenkrupp—as well as those in the auto and supplier industry and other sectors—is to break the control of the corrupt trade union apparatus and its mafia-like company structures and take the defence of jobs into their own hands.

This requires the establishment of independent rank-and-file action committees that fight for the rights and interests of the workers and put them above the profit interests of the corporations and investors. And it requires an international strategy that coordinates the growing resistance and combines it into a common international struggle.

At Thyssenkrupp, the establishment of a new and independent resistance organisation is very urgent.

At the end of April, company spokespeople had already announced the job cuts and the entry of Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky into Stahl AG. At the time, IG Metall immediately went on the barricades. It gathered several thousand steelworkers from all locations in front of the Thyssenkrupp steel administration building in the north of

Duisburg and the company headquarters in Essen, where they were to listen to the cacophony organised by the apparatchiks from the works councils and IG Metall.

But the protest was not about halting the planned destruction of the livelihoods of many thousands of steelworkers and their families. It was about keeping the bureaucrats' lucrative jobs in the joint venture that would be created when Kretinsky's company, EP Corporate Group (EPCG), took over 50 percent of Thyssenkrupp Steel. The bureaucrats feared that the new company might have its headquarters outside Germany, thus eliminating the legally regulated corruption known as "Montanmitbestimmung" (co-determination in the coal and steel industry).

The works council reps and trade union members on supervisory boards receive high, up to six-figure salaries each year. For them, it really starts to pay off when they move up to chair the personnel board. Then many a union functionary becomes an income millionaire in no time at all. Markus Grolms (chief human resources officer) and Oliver Burkhard (CEO of Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems) are just two of them. That is why the functionaries and full-time works council members fight passionately when it comes to their own interests. The workers serve them only as a means of pressure in their dispute with the group's top management.

When an agreement was reached that stipulated the "transfer of the current co-determination regulations of Thyssenkrupp AG to the new holding company," the trade union and works council agreed to the job cuts, but as usual demanded "no compulsory redundancies."

In fact, since German reunification in 1990, half of all jobs in the German steel industry have been destroyed, a total of 90,000, without a single steelworker being laid off "compulsorily." The renunciation of "compulsory redundancies" is the modus operandi by which the trade union apparatuses destroy jobs in their "social partnership" with the corporations. They know numerous other ways to drive workers out of the company.

There are still around 90,000 men and women working in the steel industry in Germany. The global growth of trade wars and military wars is driving competition for raw materials, energy and markets to dangerous levels. This is putting the steel industry in Germany and throughout Europe under considerable pressure.

In June, the insolvency of the largest steelworks in the Czech Republic was confirmed by the courts. The Liberty Ostrava plant belongs to Liberty Steel, which in turn is part of the GFG Group, owned by the British-Indian billionaire Sanjeev Gupta. GFG took over the plant from the Luxembourg-based ArcelorMittal Group in 2019. With more than 5,000 employees, it is one of the most important employers in the region.

In Italy, ArcelorMittal pulled out of the insolvent steelworks in Taranto, one of the largest in Europe, four months ago. Acciaierie d'Italia (ADI)—the Italian steel company formerly

known as Ilva—was only taken over by ArcelorMittal in 2018. Now, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has placed it under state supervision. Some 8,000 employees fear for their jobs.

A few weeks ago we wrote:

In this situation, steelworkers must not allow themselves to be chained to the companies and the federal government by IG Metall. They are in the process of sacrificing their livelihoods to the ruling elite's war plans.

Immediately after the start of the war in Ukraine, IG Metall Baden-Württemberg issued a joint statement with the Südwestmetall employers' association in support of the NATO proxy war against Russia and announced: "These measures will demand sacrifices from all of us." Last year, the IGM also took part in the concerted action convened by Chancellor Olaf Scholz to discuss how the billions involved could be passed on to the working class.

Together with the defence industry, the union is calling for the build-up of the country's war and weapons industry. Oliver Burkhard, a former trade union official, is head of one of Germany's largest defence companies, namely Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS).

This close network of works council reps and union officials, supervisory board members and personnel directors is now introducing the next round of social cuts. The steelworkers at Thyssenkrupp, HKM, Salzgitter, ArcelorMittal, Georgsmarienhütte, etc., are confronted with this united front. They are supposed to pay for the pro-war policy with their jobs.

This must not be allowed. The struggle against job cuts must be linked to the struggle against war. This is only possible against the IG Metall, not with it.

We call on all Thyssenkrupp workers to participate in the establishment of an action committee to defend all jobs and workers' rights in principle.

Contact us! It's time to act and organise a rebellion against IG Metall and the works council dictatorship. Send a WhatsApp message to +491633378340 or register using the form below.



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[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)