

After plant closures announced at VW: For a global rank-and-file campaign against job cuts in the auto industry!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
29 October 2024

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees calls for a global campaign against job cuts in auto and other industries. The massive attacks by transnational corporations, aided and abetted by the trade union bureaucracy, must be answered by mobilizing the power of the international working class.

Workers must prepare a global campaign, including worldwide pickets and rallies and culminating in international strike action. The ground for this must be prepared by establishing lines of communication between autoworkers in the US, Germany and other countries, in alliance with workers in other industries facing cuts, including at Boeing, which has announced 17,000 layoffs in retaliation against the nearly seven-week strike.

Rank-and-file committees among autoworkers in both North America and Europe must be expanded to include every key factory, giving workers the power to shut down the global industry.

On Monday, the IG Metall union in Germany announced that Volkswagen would be closing at least three plants in the country, destroying tens of thousands of jobs. This is the latest in a global jobs bloodbath in the auto industry. In Europe alone, this includes the slated closure of an Audi plant in Belgium and cuts by Ford, Stellantis and other major automakers, as well as tens of thousands of job cuts in the parts industry.

Major cuts are underway in the US, with nearly 2,450 job cuts at Stellantis' Warren Truck Assembly Plant and thousands more supplemental workers who have been fired. On Tuesday, Stellantis announced more cuts at its Mack Assembly Plant in Detroit. GM is temporarily laying off 1,700 workers at its Fairfax, Kansas plant and summarily fired hundreds of temporary part-time workers across the country. This follows the elimination of 1,000 salaried employees in its software and services division.

If management has its way, these cuts will be dwarfed in the coming years. The jobs massacre is part of the transition

in the global auto industry to electric vehicles. Companies are in relentless competition to cut jobs, both to offset the cost of investment and to realize lower labor costs promised by the new technology. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of jobs are under threat.

Jobs in other industries, from the railroads to the docks, logistics, engineering and film acting, are threatened by other emerging technologies such as automation and AI. The productivity of labor long ago reached the level required to eliminate poverty and all other social problems. That these problems not only persist, but are worsening is due to the subordination of all economic life to private profit.

The IWA-RFC rejects the "right" of the capitalists to control production to maximize profit by driving workers into the ground. Instead, we fight to realize the social rights of the working class through workers' control over production, through the transformation of the giant corporations into public utilities. The benefits of new technologies must go toward the improvement of the lives of the producers, not the further enrichment of a handful of parasites.

The campaign against layoffs must be on a world scale because every industry operates using globalized production and supply chains. There is no such thing anymore as a "German" or "American" car. Instead, modern vehicles are a product of the coordinated labor of workers in dozens of countries, regardless of whether the corporate headquarters are in Wolfsburg or Detroit.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the ruling class is seeking to blame competition from China for the mass layoffs. The Biden administration has imposed 100 percent tariffs on Chinese vehicles, while on Tuesday, the European Union massively increased tariffs on Chinese vehicles to as much as 45.3 percent. These protectionist measures are a regressive tax on consumers, forcing working people to subsidize the profits of the automakers through higher prices.

For decades, the major corporations have used global production as a wedge to pit workers in a global race to the bottom. But with an international strategy that rejects the national divisions promoted by the labor bureaucracies and national governments, workers can take the offensive and utilize globalized production to build a far more powerful, united class movement than was possible in the past.

Last Sunday's meeting, sponsored by the IWA-RFC, on the Boeing strike shows what is possible. Workers from six continents, including autoworkers and others, participated in a meeting on the global significance of the strike and discussed a world strategy to defend Boeing workers against attempts by the government, Boeing and the union sellouts to break the strike.

This campaign must be organized as a rebellion against the labor bureaucracy in every country, which is helping their "own" capitalists compete against foreign rivals by enforcing layoffs and wage cuts. In every country, the unions are run as bureaucratic dictatorships, totally uncontrolled by the workers within them. The apparatus must be abolished and power transferred to the rank and file.

In Germany, IG Metall, which sits on the VW supervisory board and helps manage plants through the "works councils" and other corporatist bodies, has said it will help ensure that the cuts are carried out in a "socially acceptable" way—that is, without provoking active resistance from below.

In the US, the United Auto Workers bureaucracy is helping carry out layoffs under a new sellout contract while trying to deflect blame onto Canadian and Mexican autoworkers who are also facing cuts. The UAW is so closely connected to the Biden White House that it functions virtually as a department of the federal government.

The only viable perspective is one based on mobilizing workers themselves to transfer power from the uncontrollable union apparatus to the shop floor. Rank-and-file committees must be built as new organs of power, giving workers the means to act independently to enforce their democratic will and prepare actions on a world scale.

The bureaucrats cannot be "pressured" from below into changing course because their six-figure salaries depend on providing labor peace to both management and capitalist governments. The response must be to smash the authority of the bureaucracy, not reform it.

Volkswagen, first founded as the national car company of Nazi Germany, is among the most prominent examples in the world of the integration of the unions with management and the state. "Deutschland, Inc." is run as a tripartite alliance between corporate shareholders, IG Metall and the German government. On the basis of "social partnership" and "co-determination," it was claimed, the interests of workers and capital could be reconciled.

The plant closures expose this as a lie. What it really means is the national unity of management, the government and the bureaucrats against the workers.

On both sides of the Atlantic, this tripartite alliance is taking on the character of a war coalition. Biden calls the unions his "domestic NATO" and relies on the bureaucracy to keep supply chains running that are critical to war. The same is true in Germany, where the government is carrying out the biggest remilitarization since the Nazis. Meanwhile, the union officials aid and abet attempts to criminalize opposition to war, including the genocide in Gaza.

The impossibility of workers defending themselves within a purely national framework is shown by the slide towards dictatorship in every country. The entire corporatist labor framework more and more resembles the national labor syndicates under fascism, which were designed to strangle the independence of the working class and prepare the country for war against foreign rivals.

It is significant that the foremost billionaire supporter of fascism is Elon Musk, whose car company, Tesla, is critical to the EV transition. His sponsorship of the fascist movement which Trump is building shows that attacks being planned against the working class are incompatible with democratic forms of rule. The union bureaucracy, steeped for decades in anti-communism and attacks on foreigners and immigrants for "stealing" jobs, is fully prepared to accommodate itself to a fascist dictatorship.

The working class must mobilize on a world scale against the profit system, which is incompatible with equality. The fight against layoffs must be connected to a fight for workers' control over new technologies to improve the quality of life and meet human needs. Volkswagen and the other transnational corporations must be transformed into public utilities, run by the workers themselves for the benefit of all. This must be connected to a fight by the working class against war, which is being driven by US and European imperialism's drive to conquer resources, markets and supply chains.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact