

Warning strikes at nine VW plants in Germany

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On Monday, the IG Metall union called warning strikes at almost all VW plants as a dead end outlet for the immense opposition among autoworkers to planned mass layoffs, wage cuts and plant closures across Germany.

The first strike began in Zwickau in the morning, followed by two-hour warning strikes in Wolfsburg, Hanover, Emden, Braunschweig and Chemnitz. Later, the workforces in other plants also briefly shut down production. The short work stoppages, which IG Metall called “pinprick warning strikes,” were repeated by every shift in some plants.

At a rally in Wolfsburg, IG Metall works council leader Daniela Cavallo made it clear that the only concern of the union and the works council was cooling the anger of the workforce, and not with taking up a fight against company management. With the expiry of the old contract, the “industrial peace” clause had lapsed and the opportunity for token strikes was now being used, she said, “to let off steam.” Last Thursday, the third round of contract bargaining at VW ended without an agreement.

Cavallo’s hackneyed phrases “that we are now fighting and showing our teeth,” sounded completely hollow and pathetic. Her main demand was that not only the workers, “but everyone” must make sacrifices.

“We demand that everyone make their contribution—including the board and the shareholders,” she read from her speech script. “Volkswagen has been a huge profit machine in recent times.” Now that it was faltering, the owner families must make their contribution. She criticised the dividend payments and bonuses for board members—to which the IG Metall officials and the social-democratic representatives of the state government, who have a majority on the supervisory board, have agreed.

If Cavallo and the other works council bigwigs think they can keep the situation under control with a few hackneyed phrases and limited protests, they are sorely

mistaken.

The shock over the announced mass layoffs, wage cuts and plant closures runs deep, and the real role of IG Metall as co-managers, enforcing the directives of the board and the owner families, is becoming increasingly obvious.

It is barely two weeks since IG Metall and the works council offered VW management wage cuts totalling 1.5 billion euros. This sweeping offer, which the works council shamelessly presented as a concession approved by the workforce, was welcomed by VW management, but rejected as insufficient. Management said that plant closures were still on the table.

Yesterday, Cavallo called for the VW board to be forced to accept the “offer” of the works council. In other words, while many workers want to fight against the general attack on wages and jobs, the IG Metall is using the token strikes to lend weight to its offer of worse wages and working conditions.

IG Metall proposes that the 120,000 VW workers receive not a penny more in wages over the next 25 months and forgo bonuses to which they are entitled. When sales are slow, they are to work shorter hours without their income being reduced even further—the difference, however, is to be paid out of a “Future Fund” financed by the workers themselves. IG Metall wants to agree to a nominal wage increase as recently set by the miserable contract covering the metal and electrical industries, however, this will not be paid into workers’ pockets but go into the Future Fund.

It is becoming increasingly clear that VW workers—like workers in all other companies—cannot wage a serious struggle to defend jobs and wages without breaking the union straitjacket.

Yesterday’s token strikes, which brought the entire production to a halt for a few hours, provide an indication of the economic and social power of autoworkers. A

comprehensive, unlimited strike of all 120,000 VW workers would be an important first step in repelling management's austerity plans.

The support that such a struggle would receive from other workers and most of the population was also evident yesterday.

In Hanover, 5,000 strikers marched through the state capital of Lower Saxony. Shouts such as "The board must go" could be heard. Residents applauded because they know very well that the threatened job cuts will affect the entire city. The VW plant in Hanover was built in 1956 as the company's second German production facility. Currently, the Multivan and the all-electric ID.Buzz, introduced in 2022, are produced there.

Approximately 14,700 people work at the site. There has been a steady decline in jobs since 2020, mainly through not filling vacancies. 3,000 jobs have been cut since then, with another 2,000 to follow by 2029. But since the board's announcement to close three plants altogether and to axe all the others, many fear the worst.

At VW's second-largest plant, in Kassel-Baunatal, production was also temporarily brought to a halt by the token strikes. There, too, the fear of the effects of mass layoffs and the threat of plant closure is omnipresent.

The cuts programme, for which workers at VW are supposed to pay with their jobs and incomes, must be seen in the context of the rapidly deepening international crisis of the capitalist system. It is a consequence of the bitter global struggle for market share and profits, which is being fought on the backs of the international working class and is increasingly leading to trade wars and outright wars.

Volkswagen is rapidly losing market share, especially in China, where it sold one in three cars until recently. Last spring, Volkswagen lost its role as market leader there to the Chinese electric carmaker BYD, which now sells more cars in China than all VW brands—Volkswagen, Audi, Porsche, Skoda, Jetta and Sehol—combined.

The attack on jobs and wages can only be repulsed if workers unite internationally and place their social rights above the corporations' profit claims. This requires a break with the trade unions and their works council reps, which are standing by "their" respective national corporations in both the international trade war and the attacks on the workers.

The building of independent rank-and-file action committees is now of great importance. The common front of government, corporations and trade unions must be countered by the international unification of the

working class. Those who create all the wealth in society and bear the full brunt of war and crisis must intervene independently in political events and confront the big banks and corporations, as well as their stooges in government.

This requires a rebellion against IG Metall and the rejection of its policy of "social partnership."

The assault on workers from above must be counterposed with the fightback of the working class. By building independent action committees, it is possible to unite workers across all borders and fight for a perspective that puts the rights and interests of workers above the profit interests of investors, speculators and the super-rich.

"Volkswagen and the other transnational corporations must be transformed into public utilities, run by the workers themselves for the benefit of all," the call for a global campaign against job cuts by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) explained. "This must be accompanied by the building of an anti-war movement in the working class, because the race for raw materials, markets and supply chains is driving US and European imperialism to war."

We call on all workers in the metal and electrical industries and beyond: break the dictatorship of the IG Metall apparatus! Demand a strike ballot on all contracts! Participate in founding action committees and support the building of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), which arms workers with a socialist perspective in the fight against mass layoffs, social cuts and war.

Contact us via Whatsapp message at +491633378340 or fill out the form. It is now time to take action to prevent a catastrophe.



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