

Stellantis: The Opel plant at Rüsselsheim, Germany shrinks to single-shift operations

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At Stellantis's Opel plant in Rüsselsheim, production will be reduced to just one shift starting December 9. Hundreds of contract workers will lose their jobs. The jobs of the technicians at the development center are also in acute danger.

The assembly lines have been at a standstill all week, after production was halted for several days in the first and third weeks of October. The main Opel plant was originally designed for three-shift operation and at its peak employed over 40,000 autoworkers. Today, just 1,600 work in production, and for months now only one and a half shifts have been running. Soon there will only be one shift.

For several hundred contract workers, the change means the end of their jobs, and many will also lose their jobs at the contract staffing agencies. In October, 130 contract workers at Opel were forced out. The works council and IG Metall trade union refused to even seriously protest their sacking.

As the company explicitly stated in its reports, all measures are "implemented in consultation with IG Metall and the Opel works council." In fact, some of the job-cutting measures are based directly on their initiative. The works council does not represent the affected workers but acts as an extension of management, which is "in constant communication with the works council," as the company boasts.

Management and union officials are dividing the workforce to prevent an effective united struggle against the attacks. While the contract workers are being sacked, the permanent workers are to receive their wages this week despite the stoppage—not out of concern for their income, but to prevent them from showing solidarity with the dismissed workers.

The works council representatives have responded to the announcements from Stellantis with the hypocritical

demand for "immediate permanent contracts for all colleagues with temporary contracts." They have also demanded another vehicle be built in Rüsselsheim. At present, the Astra and the DS4 are being manufactured at the plant, although the DS4 in particular is having sales difficulties. The Opel board has not responded to these demands in any way. There is a risk that Opel will instead lay off the majority of temporary employees whose contracts expire at the end of the year.

The cuts also affect the International Technical Development Centre ITEC Rüsselsheim, where every second technician there still at Stellantis is to lose his or her job. Right after Stellantis was formed, a large part of ITEC was outsourced, handed over to service provider Segula or dismantled.

Opel now employs only around 9,000 in Rüsselsheim; another 1,000 or so will be cut. There used to be a saying that "when Opel coughs, Rüsselsheim gets the flu." But with the takeover by the PSA Group and shortly afterwards the merger with Fiat Chrysler to form Stellantis, the sweeping cuts continued. From 2019 to 2022, the number of employees fell from just under 14,000 to below 12,000, and since then, more and more jobs have been systematically destroyed.

At Opel in Eisenach, too, well over 500 employees, or about 40 percent, are only hired as temporary workers. Of more than 2,000 workers, only about 1,300 are still employed there, building the Grandland SUV in a two-shift operation. The agency workers could be made redundant at any time. The promised construction of a battery plant employing 2,000 workers in Kaiserslautern has also been halted and will not take place. Another Opel plant in Aspern, near Vienna, Austria, was closed in July.

The Stellantis management board and supervisory board have only one answer to the challenges posed by global competition and the transition to e-mobility: intensifying the exploitation of the workforce to further increase profits. This has led to sharp conflicts in the clique of billionaires at the top of the company.

CEO Carlos Tavares, one of the world's best-paid managers at €36 million, has fallen out with John Elkann of the Italian Agnelli clan and the wealthy Peugeot family in France. Tavares had already announced in October that he would step down from his executive position after 2026. On Monday, he resigned with immediate effect.

The job cuts in Rüsselsheim are part of a massive cull at Stellantis and other auto companies around the world. The fourth-largest automaker (in terms of sales) is also attacking wages and jobs in the US, Britain, Italy and France. In all these countries, the national autoworker unions are helping to enforce the attacks against the workers in the name of "competitiveness."

In the US, the company, with the complicity of the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, dismissed 2,400 at the Stellantis truck plant in Warren, near Detroit, in October. Another 1,100 workers will be indefinitely laid off at the Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio, next month. In Italy, up to 12,000 jobs are to be cut at Fiat, which is also part of Stellantis. Thousands of Italian car workers have repeatedly taken to the streets to protest against this and the threat to a further 13,000 jobs in the Italian supply industry, but so far, they have been held back by FIOM, the metalworkers' union.

In the UK, the Vauxhall plant in Luton is being closed and 1,100 jobs destroyed. Vauxhall is the longest-standing brand associated with Opel, since 1925 when General Motors first took over the group.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has taken up the fight at Stellantis in the US and Vauxhall in the UK to build action committees independent of the union apparatus. This is the only way to conduct a principled defense of all jobs and fight for better wages and secure conditions. This is an international fight, directed against the global corporation and its billionaire shareholders, as well as their lackeys in government and the trade unions.

This is also the way the fight for jobs at Opel must be taken up. An action committee must be formed

independently of the IG Metall bureaucracy and the Opel works councils. This will take up the fight for jobs, working conditions and wages together with Stellantis workers around the world. It will also play an important role in the fight against the threat of war. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees will support it.

The action committee is reaching out to all workers, whether temporary, on short-term contracts or permanent, to mobilise them together. "Autoworkers of the world, unite!" the Vauxhall-Luton statement reads.

Any sacrifices demanded by the IG Metall and works council in the name of the "future of the production site" at Opel-Rüsselsheim must be rejected! There is no reason to make concessions to the millionaire executives and shareholders and their highly paid union lackeys.

Why, for example, should technological advances such as e-mobility, digitally controlled driving and artificial intelligence serve to increase stock market prices or finance devastating wars? Instead, every advance must be used to shorten the working day, to finally improve wages and to serve society as a whole. To achieve this, the auto companies must be placed under the direct democratic control of the employees.



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