

Ford Genk: FIGHT AGAINST CLOSURE?

LET'S FIGHT HARDER TO MAKE THE BOSS AND THE STATE PAY!

On 24 October, Ford announced the closure of the factory in Genk and probably those in Southampton and Dagenham as well. Ford is restructuring all of its production sites in Europe. In Belgium, that's 4,300 working at Ford Genk and close to 6,000 working for subcontractors who'll lose their jobs some time in 2013/2014. In Britain close to 1400 workers are under threat. Once again, the unions, the town hall bigwigs, the MPs, the Flemish Region officials, the ministers are "astonished" and "scandalised" by this decision and act like it's a case of vile treason by some nasty boss, "foreign" as well... who scarcely two months ago gave them a "guarantee" that the new model of the Mondeo would be produced in 2013 !!!

It is "a veritable catastrophe", a "social bloodbath"... there are no words strong enough. While the situation of the car industry in Europe, and particularly that of Ford, never ceases to get worse, they moan, organise symbolic "citizens" protests, and promise some crumbs as consolation, planned redundancy schemes, redeployment, while above all calling on the workers to remain calm and "responsible" and to stay at home, while they negotiate with Ford. It's not like this that we can fight effectively against the consequences of closures and redundancies.

Workers, comrades, all these people are FALSE FRIENDS !

The boss is not going to change his mind !

Before even making vehicles, Ford, as a good capitalist business, must make profits. With a posted loss of close to 1.5 billion dollars in Europe this year, Ford has to do something. The rate of utilisation of its sites in Europe is only 50 to 60%, while to make a profit a car factory needs to be running at at least 80% of its capacity. At Ford Genk, this rate is only 48%, far behind the Spanish and German sites (Saarlouis and Cologne, which are comparable in terms of costs of production). And the vehicles produced at Genk are coming to the end of their life. Briefly stated, an analyst (Colin Lagan of UBS) has calculated that the cost of closing Ford Genk will be 1.1 billion dollars, but will save between 500 and 700 million dollars per year. This is the implacable logic of capital, but Ford can't hide the fact that restructuring is essentially happening on the backs of the workers.

First and foremost, you can only count on yourselves, on organising yourselves, among yourselves with your workmates and with people from the sub-contractors which are also affected by the long process of restructuring of the car industry.

After having accepted wage cuts and a speed up of work two years ago – to save jobs! –, your backs are to the wall and there is no other solution than struggle, to go on strike. You need to keep the stock of parts and cars under your control to use as a bargaining chip so as to screw as much money out of Ford as possible. After the announcement of the closure of Volkswagen-Forest, in November 2006, it was enough for a work stoppage and the fear which it created for those laid off to get millions in redundancy money. The workers of Volkswagen-Forest got, on average, 144,000 euros each, and those of Opel Anvers, 153,000 euros. The operating profit of Ford will be more than 2 billion dollars in the third quarter of this year. So there's plenty of margin for more than the 77,000 euros redundancy money proposed, which will be less than 50,000 euros net, because the state which "supports" the workers is going to take its cut in the form of taxes. **We have to** fight against the state to make it drop the taxes imposed on redundancy payments. The state and the region, completely "mired in debt", are not going to come to your aid. The capitalists and their state prefer to save the banks rather than the companies which don't make enough profit.

You must not consider yourselves as only car workers but as workers who face the attack of the bosses seen by other workers, above all in the Belgian context where all the nationalisms and regionalisms are there to divide us. Whether workers are Flemish or Walloon, factory closures will have the same consequences for everyone. Nationalism, in Flanders like anywhere else, is not the solution. The workers have no country: the "nationality" of the workers is their class.

The government has been ready to help the Belgian car industry financially, but not the workers expelled from production. What we propose is the opposite: wages must be guaranteed by the bosses and by the state whatever happens to their factories. And this goes for all the staff affected directly or indirectly by the restructuring plans. The objective is ambitious and political, but this is what is at stake here.

Take your struggle into your own hands, without waiting for a hypothetical and illusory "trade union solution". What compromise can they propose, faced with the final stage of closures?

We have to make them pay! Only struggle can do it!

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