

German Ford workers express solidarity with their Romanian co-workers

By Marianne Arens
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Whenever Ford workers in Germany learn of the spontaneous strike by Ford workers at the Craiova plant in Romania, they respond with great interest and enthusiasm. Workers at Ford's Saarlouis plant in western Germany expressed their solidarity with the workers' struggle in Romania.

Shortly before Christmas, 1,000 workers in Craiova downed tools to block the imposition of an exploitative contract by Ford Motor Company. By contrast, their trade union representatives had already signed the deal.

In Craiova, where Ford workers build the EcoSport SUV, Ford wants to impose a two-year contract on the workers. The wages of long-serving workers are to be frozen while those of new hires will be cut to a level below the minimum wage. In some cases, new hires will receive just €300 per month. Romanian autoworkers already earn a mere fraction of what their colleagues in Western Europe make for the same job.

Workers in Craiova continue to resist the contract. However, they confront not only the giant corporation, but the trade union, which collaborates closely with management. They are also fighting against the government, which is imposing the full burden of social insurance contributions (including the employers' portion) onto the workers. Ford has made the offsetting of these costs by the company conditional on the acceptance of the new contract.

Workers in Craiova made contact with the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* to inform their colleagues in Western Europe and North America about their struggle. Workers continue to be angry with management and the union, which has sought to bottle up the opposition through various mediation ploys with the company and the government, while telling workers it would take two months for the union to be legally free to call a strike.

On 10 January, a WSWs reporting team distributed the statement "Romanian Ford workers defiant as company seeks to impose blackmail contract." A token "warning strike" was called that day by IG Metall, which was supported by the workers in hopes of securing a pay increase and more free time. Ford employs 6,000 workers in the state of Saarland.

Numerous Ford workers, and workers from auto parts suppliers, took the WSWs leaflet and many returned for extra copies. Several said they intended to visit the web site to learn more about the ongoing workers' struggle in Romania.

During the shift change, a Ford worker expressed his support for the call for Ford workers around the world to unite, stating, "Pressure is also being stepped up here constantly. It destroys everything, and it breaks up families!" He added that he would be ready to wage an international struggle straight away.

Another worker introduced himself as a WSWs reader who said he already knew about the wildcat strike in Romania and had informed his colleagues. Jens, who has worked at Ford for 25 years, told us the company deliberately plays workers of different nationalities off against each other.

"When they were talking here about establishing a new plant, they constantly threaten us by saying, 'In Romania, it's SO-O-O much cheaper. And I learnt from the WSWs that in Romania, they threaten the Romanian workers with wage levels in China. They probably threaten the Chinese workers with the Mexicans or Vietnamese.'" Jens continued, "Hopefully the colleagues in Romania stick to their guns. They shouldn't let themselves be intimidated."

Jens said he thought it was a deliberate move by Google and other firms to block access to the WSWs. "Absolutely nobody knew about Craiova here," said

Jens. “Then last week I sent the article around because I know the WSWS.”

Many workers pointed out that their struggle at Ford in Saarlouis is connected with the struggle in Craiova. The future of the plant is directly dependent on the outcome of such job actions as in Romania. One worker said, “If management is able to make the Romanian workers concede, our production will move to Eastern Europe sooner or later.”

An elderly worker stated, “After the fall of the Eastern European states, the situation also got worse for us.” He reported that he started out at Ford as a temporary contract worker, but received a permanent job after two years. Many temporary contract workers are employed at Ford, where they are forced to accept a starting wage of €10 per hour (US\$11.99), around half the normal pay, in the hope of securing a permanent post. “But this has not happen regularly for a long time,” the worker added.

The worker continued that he is employed in logistics, where the products from external suppliers arrive. “We can see daily from the parts how international our operations are. They come from every part of the world: from Spain, Mexico, China, Poland and elsewhere.”

Timo, a Ford worker, was visibly shaken when he learned of the conditions in Romania. “The strike by these workers was justified. They should have the same rights as us,” said Timo. He hopes that a reasonable contract is concluded “from which everyone can live and which offers security.”

Workers at Saarstahl in Völklingen and from Dillinger Hütte, who also took part in the warning strike, spoke about the company’s efforts to reduce wages by eliminating the top pay bracket. “You have to fight constantly,” said Frank, an older steelworker.

A worker at Dillinger Hütte reported that workloads have increased substantially over recent times. “But the conditions in Romania, that’s much worse,” he added. He knew of another example from Eastern Europe, saying, “In Bulgaria, wages are as low as in Romania, and prices are going up in all of these countries because of the EU. I cannot imagine how they make ends meet.” Markus, a young Ford worker on the assembly line, commented, “You can’t compare it to Germany, but they ought to be able to live from their wage.”

“It is a scandal how they are dealing with colleagues

in Romania,” said Eddy. He took several flyers and began handing them out to workers. He said the information had to be shared immediately, and that he would raise it with the works council. “Why did IG Metall not do something about this long ago?”

In fact, IG Metall has done everything to prevent German workers from knowing about and being inspired by the fight of their Romanian brothers and sisters. One searches in vain on the IG Metall’s website for a statement on the conflict in Romania. The unions affiliated with the German Trade Union Association welcomed the reintroduction of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the works council, which fully promotes Ford’s corporate interests, upon which it relies financially, agreed to the shutdown of the Ford plant in Genk, Belgium, four years ago and assisted in the organization of attacks on wages and working conditions in Cologne and Saarlouis.

At the time, management threatened to outsource production to Romania if the cuts and plant shutdowns were not accepted. IG Metall supported this blackmail and enforced it against the workforce. When workers in Craiova went on strike, IG Metall concealed this from Ford workers in Western Europe.

These comments make clear that a growing number of workers understand the necessity of uniting internationally against the global corporations. The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* was established to inform workers around the world about the struggles of their colleagues.

The *Autoworker Newsletter* proposes that workers in Romania, Germany and the rest of Europe establish rank-and-file action committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the pro-capitalist and nationalist unions and unify their struggle internationally against the global automakers and the capitalist profit system.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>