

Renault workers say: “Europe without frontiers yes, Europe without jobs no”

By Colin Foster

“EUROPE without frontiers yes, Europe without jobs no”, was among the slogans on a 70,000 strong march in Brussels on 16 March, where workers from the threatened Renault car factory at Vilvoorde, Belgium, were joined by delegations from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, Portugal, Greece and Austria.

In the 1970s and 1980s steelworkers fought closures and job cuts all across Europe. But they fought separately. French workers fought to save French steelworks, Italian workers to save Italian steelworks. Within Britain there were rival campaigns to save “Scottish steel” and “Welsh steel”. Militant French steelworkers seized truckloads of German steel and tipped them on

to the railway tracks.

The Renault struggle shows a major step forward from that tragic and counterproductive division. Renault workers in Belgium and France staged a “Euro-strike” on 7 March, and a “Euro-demonstration” on 11 March, singing the *Internationale* outside Renault’s company HQ in Paris. Despite Renault bosses saying that they plan to expand production in Spain when they close Vilvoorde, the strike and the demonstration were supported by Spanish Renault workers.

When Renault announced the closure of the Vilvoorde factory in late February, together with 2,700 job cuts across their French factories, the Vilvoorde workers responded by occupying their factory but also by reaching out to other workers and holding their first demonstration in Brussels on 3 March.

There are special reasons why the Vilvoorde workers should shun the idea that workers in each factory, or country, should secure their future at the expense of others by proving themselves more “competitive”. For some years now the Vilvoorde factory has been held up to workers in other Renault plants as a model of productivity.

The plant was almost totally reconstructed and automated three years ago. The workers gave up their eight-hour shifts and five-day week to accept “flexible” working. Their work rate is electronically monitored, and they have only four minutes’ break each hour. Their quality of production is the best in the combine — or so workers at other Renault factories have been told.

Probably that flexibility is why the Renault bosses thought they could shut Vilvoorde with little protest. But they were wrong.