

CENTRAL OFFICE

T&G SECTION

18 February 2009

Dr Norbert Reithofer
Chairman of the Board of Management
BMW Group
80788 Munich
Germany

Via email and post

Dear Dr Reithofer

I am writing to you to register in the strongest possible terms the outrage UNITE feel at the manner in which you have announced the dismissal of 850 people at Plant Oxford.

In short, we feel that you have treated your workforce with utter contempt. The difficulties of the car industry globally are well known, but the manner in which BMW has sought to address the reduction of its volumes at the Cowley Plant in the UK is nothing short of disgraceful. You would not treat a dog in this way, never mind loyal and committed "employees".

We had hoped that we had moved past the turbulent relationship we had with BMW in the aftermath of 2000 and felt that the launch of the Mini marked a new positive chapter in our relationship. There is no doubt that together we have tackled a number of difficult issues, most recently pensions – we may have had differences of opinion but have always found a way forward. However all of this seems to have been pushed aside as once again you have put production and profitability before people.

The dismissal of the weekend shift, with many workers who have worked at Cowley for up to five years with only one hour's notice has to rank as the most outrageous form of dismissal that we have experienced in the car industry in the UK. You have exploited not only our agreement on the use of agency labour, but also more importantly, you have exploited ordinary working men and women who deserve better treatment from an employer of your standing.

I give you notice that we intend to review the policy on the use of agency labour within BMW and I have asked my National Secretary, Dave Osborne, to initiate this discussion at a meeting that has been arranged at the Plant for Friday of this week. Notwithstanding any announcements you may have already made to employees (permanent or agency) we do not expect you to confirm any dismissals until we have had proper negotiations about the situation.

I do not believe that the use of agency labour extending for years was ever the intention of the agreement and, most certainly, it was not to see the creation of second class citizens who don't even have the entitlement to redundancy payments in spite of years of service at times of downsizing.

This cannot be right and I am seeking a meeting with you in order to not only put right this wrongdoing, but also to talk with you about a more humane way of short-time working without having to bank hours for the core employees and without prematurely sacking people.

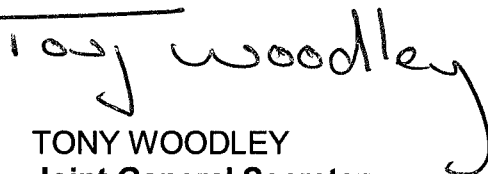
You will be aware that the Union nationally had absolutely no knowledge whatsoever of your intentions at Cowley until speculation materialised in one of our Sunday papers. This in spite of the fact that my National Officer, Dave Osborne, was in the plant last Wednesday, without even the slightest hint of what was to materialise. For the life of me, I can't understand why a company such as BMW would wish to remain secretive. If you had been more open, I would have had the opportunity to explain to you the discussions that I have been leading with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) and the Government at Prime Minister level since mid-November 2008 with the intention of encouraging state funding for short-time working at this uniquely difficult time for the whole of our industry. These discussions are in my view at an advanced stage.

Let me finish by saying this: I make no apologies for my emotive language in this letter. My members, be they permanent or agency, are workers with families and responsibilities, not some asset to be cast aside as cannon fodder, never mind called to a meeting at one hour's notice and even told, to add insult to injury, that if you don't hand your overalls in, we'll take £35 out of your wages.

So, Mr Chairman, I not only speak for my members but I think for Britain, when I ask for a meeting with your company to find a more acceptable solution to what I appreciate is a difficult time for both BMW and the industry.

I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Yours sincerely,



TONY WOODLEY
Joint General Secretary