

# Germany: State Premier of North Rhine Westphalia slanders Romanian workers

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11 September 2009

At rallies held as part of the election campaign for the state legislature in North Rhine Westphalia, state premier Jürgen Rüttgers (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) insulted Romanian workers, calling them lazy and unreliable.

A video on *YouTube* shows Rüttgers at a CDU meeting in Duisburg on August 26 saying: “And in contrast to workers in the Ruhr area, in Romania they don’t come for their first shift at seven o’clock and stay till the end. They come and go when they want, and they don’t know what they’re doing.”

In addition, he directed another broadside against Chinese investors: “And if it must be, then we will meet with a load of Chinese people in the city hall to discuss something or other. And if in the end they don’t want to invest in Duisburg, then they will be choked until they find Duisburg.”

No objections were raised or attempts made to dissociate themselves from these anti-foreigner outbursts by Duisburg’s mayor Adolf Sauerland (CDU), who stood beside Rüttgers on the podium, or by Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) when it was repeated at a rally in Bonn. The journalists present also did not take up these racist utterances. Rüttgers is said to have expressed himself in a similar vein at other meetings.

This is not a “slip” by the state premier, but expresses a method. It is not the first time that the North Rhine Westphalian state premier and deputy CDU federal leader has played the nationalist card in order to counteract the threat of CDU losses in an election. He appeals thereby to the basest instincts of his audience and tries to whip up workers in Germany against workers in other countries and of different origins.

Rüttgers stands on the far right of the CDU. Ten years ago, as the leader of the “integration working

group,” he formulated the text of a petition against dual nationality, which helped Roland Koch (CDU) win the Hesse state elections in 1999.

Subsequently, in January 2000, Rüttgers was selected by a 98.3 percent vote as his party’s lead candidate in the state elections in North Rhine Westphalia.

Like Koch, he also played the racist card in the campaign to control the state legislature in Düsseldorf. At that time, he attempted to whip up sentiments against the suggested Green Card regulation for foreign computer specialists, with a campaign slogan of “children instead of Indians” (in German, “Kinder statt Inder”). However, the general population rejected this smear campaign and his campaign failed.

In the 2005 North Rhine Westphalia state elections, Rüttgers and the CDU were finally able to profit from the widespread rejection of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The Agenda 2010 and Hartz welfare cuts and labour “reforms” had lost the SPD-Green Party federal government of Gerhard Schröder (SPD) any support they previously had among working people.

The cause of the latest smear campaign against Romanian workers was the closure of the Nokia plant in Bochum last year. This transnational has shifted its mobile phone production to Cluj in Romania, where workers earn only €250 a month.

In one way or another, the Works Councils, trade unions and all the establishment parties have tried to play off Nokia’s Bochum workforce against the Romanian workers. In January 2008, Rüttgers too hurried to Bochum when the plans for the factory closure became known.

Standing before the Nokia factory gates he expressed his outrage over the (Finnish) Nokia management and promised to support the workers hit by the closure. At that time, he also said that Nokia should ask itself

whether workers in Romania were just as punctual and reliable as workers in Bochum.

In January 2008, at a large protest demonstration against the closure of the factory, Nokia Bochum Works Council chair Gisela Achenbach was singing from the same hymn sheet. Speaking to over 15,000, who also came from Opel and other factories, she said that workers in Bochum were “better qualified, more reliable and flexible” than workers in Romania. Moreover, “unstable political conditions” existed in Romania and only the corrupt would flourish.

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented at the time in its report on the demonstration: “By adopting the argument to defend ‘German production’ advanced by politicians and big business, Achenbach pits one workforce against another and leads workers into a nationalist dead end. It is precisely this nationalist orientation of the Works Councils and the trade unions that make them more easily extorted in every regard.”

The Works Council and IG Metall union prevented a real struggle against the closure of the factory in this way: they played off workers in Germany and Romania against each other; and then in Bochum, sabotaged any joint actions by all workers. For example, they did nothing to defend subcontracted workers, who were the first to lose their jobs.

Politicians such as Rüttgers are not alone in their witch hunt against the poorest of the poor in Europe.

Romanian workers in the new Nokia factory in Cluj have to work under miserable conditions. The international economic crisis means the original grandiose plans for a so-called Nokia Village in Romania have only been realized to a small degree.

Using twelve million euros in tax funds, the Romanian government built the infrastructure of the industrial estate where the Nokia Village was supposed to develop. Nokia promised 4,000 jobs; as well as Nokia, subcontracting firms were also supposed to set up on the industrial estate. Nothing has become of this.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported in July 2009: “Hardly anything has become of Nokia’s grand plans. Only one workshop is standing, in which about 1,400 employees, including many former textile workers, assemble imported parts. Their monthly wages are €250 on average. In addition, there are some one hundred temporary workers, who are hired and fired according to the state of the order books.”

Workers employed as cleaners in the factory only earn €166 a month, less than half the average net wage in Romania. Since the end of December, the cleaners in the Nokia factory also no longer receive lunch, a young worker told the paper.

In order to cut the costs of the bus transport bringing the workers from the surrounding villages to the factory, Nokia has also extended the length of the shifts—from eight to twelve hours.



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