

Manroland: WSWS article unleashes debate in local newspaper

Our reporter
25 January 2012

Last Saturday, the editor of the *Offenbach-Post*, Frank Präse, wrote a response to the article “Manroland is broken up with the help of the union” which was published recently on the WSWS.

Under the heading of “A Bad Feeling”, Präse writes: “Yes, we’re moving on thin ice if we quote Ulrich Rippert from the *World Socialist Web Site*, who has detected a setup in the breakup of Manroland: But in fact, there are good reasons for this assessment.”

Rippert touched upon a “hot topic” when he accuses the IG Metall trade union of “betraying the interests of employees,” Präse writes. It should not be dismissed out of hand, “that by giving their consent to the destruction of the renowned press manufacturer by the Lübeck conglomerate Possehl the union did not merely irritate the workforce.”

Of course it is reasonable to assume there is a setup “when you consider that Possehl chief Lüder, IG Metall board member Jürgen Kerner and insolvency administrator Werner Schneider, had already tested out their strategy on the insolvent Augsburg Company Böwe Systec,” the editor of the *Offenbach Post* writes.

“The conduct of the proceedings, the parallels to the Augsburg Böwe Systec bankruptcy and finally the cancellation of the mass demonstration of all Manroland employees by the IG Metall and the works council, all add to a mixture which gives outsiders the uncomfortable feeling that the union representatives, liquidators and representatives from Possehl are all in cahoots.”

Präse’s comment immediately sparked a heated debate. Within a short space of time no less than 21 readers posted mails on the online forum of the *Offenbach-Post*, including many Manroland workers who fiercely attacked the works council and IG Metall.

The very first comment begins with the words: “That

is exactly it. The IG Metall has had its day. It makes one sick. Schröder [i.e. former SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder], a friend of the IG-Metall . Riester [Schröder’s labour minister], also IG Metall. Peter Hartz, also IG Metall member and the man behind the Hartz IV reform.” The author ends his comment by stating: “The IG Metall thinks only of itself and does not represent employees.”

There then follows a half-hearted defence of the union by someone called “Bos”: “And why has the workforce not brought the works council into line? Someone must have voted for them?”

A reply then comes from “Babbelmö”: “We have tried to bring them into line but they are sitting so firmly in the saddle there has been no opportunity,” he writes, describing how workers have unsuccessfully tried to change the electoral process in favour of individual candidates in order to have more influence over the composition of the council. At the next election the workers were again confronted with voting for a list of candidates. “And on the list were all the people we did not want.

“When colleagues take their place then the message is: We’ll do it better, but after a short time we noticed they are just like their predecessors.

“The works council chairman Alexandra Rossel, who sits on the company board, was elected behind our backs. She has not yet found it necessary to present herself to the manual workers on the shop floor.”

The next commentator angrily declares: “I was a member of IG Metall for 15 years as an employee at Roland. I had no choice, it was a must. Democracy? No!” During this period, the IG Metall “only represented the employer’s interests.” The unions are only concerned to provide for their officials and their apparatus. “In other words, they are useless and only

looking after themselves.”

“Robby” reports on the opposition on the part of the Offenbach workforce to the last “savings contract”, which was enforced by the IG Metall: “Anyone who wants to remain a member of IG Metall, because he still believe that it represents the interests of employees has only himself to blame! A waste of money and a blank check for the IG Metall to continue to do what it wants at the cost of society as a whole!”

A colleague from Manroland in Augsburg writes: “The fact is that at a factory meeting in Augsburg it was the works council president who was booed, not the company executive. Incidentally, the trigger was a colleague from Plauen participating in out meeting – he deserves respect.”

“Babbelmö” logs in again with this comment: “I have been a Roländer for 27 years, today is probably the last day.” He is angry and refers to the IG Metall as a “bunch of criminals”. He describes how employees at all three sites were systematically pitted against each other. “The worst is that colleagues have always been taken for a ride, the works councils and IG Metall have always played off the works against each other, but that only emerged when colleagues from other works were here, and asked why we voted differently. Then it turned out that all the colleagues would have often voted the same way but that the works council had argued that Augsburg and Plauen voted differently, so you have been overruled, and then in Plauen the story is: Offenbach and Augsburg have voted differently than you.”

He ends his entry with the words: “... anyone interested in taking a closer look at our betrayal is advised to go to the website of the *World Socialist Web Site* and read the report dealing with they way they sold us out. No other investor had any chance. It was just a game to deceive the public.”

Please note: The current debate on the experience at Manroland and the role of the IG Metall is not confined to the editorial pages of *Offenbach-Post*. Workers and supporters can reach the WSWS directly by email at psg@gleichheit.de or through the form here.



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