

# Germany: IG Metall union suppresses opposition at ThyssenKrupp

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The IG Metall (IGM) trade union has hit back following the election of a new works council at the ThyssenKrupp steel plant in Duisburg. The council, which is dominated by IGM bureaucrats, is trying to stifle all opposition and erect a sophisticated system aimed at policing workers at the factory.

IG Metall lost four of its mandates following the works council election held in early June. It retained, however, 26 of the total of 39 seats on the works council. The opposition in the council—a merger of two groupings—had been able to increase its previous five mandates to nine. Three mandates were gained by a group that terms itself “Alternative”, but usually votes with the IGM majority, while one seat went to a former member of the “IG 35-hour week” group.

The manoeuvres undertaken by IG Metall prior to the election led to general disinterest, and voter turnout was low. Although more than 90 percent of the over 13,000-strong factory workforce are members of IG Metall and the union spent a lot of money on its campaign, only 60 percent of the workforce cast ballots over the 11 days allocated for the election.

Several opposition electoral lists have queried whether IG Metall actually received the number of votes it registered. There were problems with the electronics during the vote count and the election committee, consisting solely of IGM stalwarts, rejected a manual recount.

As we have previously reported, the June election came about due to pressure from workers protesting at the action of company management and the IGM to intimidate members of the “IG 35-hour week” opposition list prior to the council election last year. Four members of the list of five, including its leader Fred Wan, challenged the council election in court and won their case in two instances. The union was

therefore forced to call a fresh election.

The former chairman of the works council at the Duisburg plant, Wilhelm Segerath, who is also head of the company’s joint works council, has now handed over his post to Günter Back, who has the task of stepping up repressive measures against the workforce. In the very first constitutive meeting of the new works council Back used his majority to push through an elaborate seven-point system for the control and intimidation of the workforce. The system involves an expanded role for the works council representatives to oversee and police workers.

Works council members, including those who are not part of the official IGM lists, are to be left to the mercy of the works council leadership. They cannot take any measures without asking permission, and cannot hold confidential discussions with colleagues unless they report what was said to the council leadership.

The new rules make absolutely clear that far from representing the interests of workers the IGM majority faction on the council functions as a police force in the interests of company management aimed at spying on and denouncing dissident workers.

This development fully confirms the assessment of the WSW. The role of the IG Metall at ThyssenKrupp is representative of the role it plays in the 50,000 companies in which it operates, with its army of 80,000 shop stewards.

At the same time, the union functions as co-manager and consulting agency for the company to increase competitiveness and profitability. Approximately 1,700 IG Metall representatives sit on the supervisory boards of companies, where they are rewarded handsomely and merge with management. Wage cuts and job losses are often worked out directly in the union headquarters and then enforced against workers, as was the case at

Opel in Bochum, HSP in Dortmund and most recently Outokumpu in Bochum. A week ago the Finnish steel group closed down its steel plant in Bochum, which belonged to the ThyssenKrupp group until recently—with the support of IG Metall.



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