

Germany: IG Metall greets far-right AfD participants at union protest

Our correspondents
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On Friday, nearly 5,000 workers and residents demonstrated in the East German town of Görlitz against the closure of the city's two last big factories. Workers' anger at the closures is immense, but the IG Metall (IGM) union is doing everything in its power to facilitate the closure of factories owned by Siemens and Bombardier. To this end the union is not only working together with the Left Party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), but also with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Demonstrators from the Siemens and Bombardier factories assembled at the city's Obermarkt, where hundreds of students and residents had already gathered. The first speaker at the protest rally was the representative of IG Metall in East Saxony, Jan Otto. Rather than issue a clear call for the defence of all jobs at Siemens and Bombardier, he appealed for "creative concepts" to keep open the two factories.

The entire demonstration was carefully orchestrated to suppress any real resistance and allow the union to parade its reactionary policies. At Bombardier only permanent employees were allowed to participate in the protest. Temporary contract workers, who will be the first to be dismissed, had to stay at work to ensure the smooth running of the factory.

Many medium-sized companies had closed down their businesses and invited their entire workforces to participate in the demonstration and students were freed from classes to participate. Nevertheless, participation was lower than expected.

The demonstration was headed by Saxony's minister of economic affairs, Martin Dulig (SPD), and the CDU member of parliament, Octavian Ursu. Dulig also spoke at the rally and called for joint talks to be held between the companies, unions and political parties. "The

company board can be sure they have very serious partners to discuss solutions," he said.

Such "solutions" between companies, unions and parties have been thrashed out on numerous occasions in the past. Firstly, wages are slashed and jobs are massively reduced, all in the name of defending the plant, then what is left of the factories is dismantled, as was the case recently with the GM-Opel factory in Bochum. Union members are provided with whistles at the toothless union protests in order to provide musical accompaniment to the closures and job losses.

The reactionary orientation of the union was most evident when Otto greeted the participation on the demonstration of the AfD. After welcoming not only representatives of the CDU, the Greens and the Left Party, Otto expressly greeted the AfD member of parliament for Görlitz, Tino Chrupalla, because, as he said, "all parties stand together here." A group of AfD right-wing extremists cheered and promptly unrolled a party banner, which they then packed away following protests by a group of young people. In the run-up to the protest, union organisers had banned all party banners.

IG Metall had already allowed the AfD march to participate at a demonstration in Görlitz last March. The fact that Otto now openly welcomes the party underlines the nationalist and anti-working class orientation of the union. It is prepared to cooperate with all and any forces in order to suppress resistance and strikes.

Chrupalla not only defends vicious racist policies and the building up of the armed state, he also propagates an extreme neoliberal program. According to his website, he wants to "reduce financial burdens on companies." In his first Bundestag speech, he excused the Siemens Group from any responsibility for the

planned dismissals. These were necessary, he maintained, because the company's home market was shrinking and the group was no longer internationally competitive.

A number of participants at the demonstration spoke out against the coalition of parties, trade unions and companies intent on job destruction.

Nineteen-year-old trainee Kai is convinced that the grand coalition of the SPD and conservative parties, currently being formed in Berlin, will carry out fierce attacks on the rights of workers. He works at Siemens in final assembly and does not know if he will be able to complete his training.

With regard to the demonstration, he said: "Something must be done, even if the situation seems hopeless." The closure of the two factories would trigger a domino effect across the region, leading to unemployment and company closures in many areas.

Another Siemens worker was certain that anger was growing. "The IGM has lost all credibility. It enforced the cuts," he said. He expected things to get even worse should the grand coalition return to power. The parties should recall what they once stood for, he said. "This is no longer a true democracy."

Mike was one of the few temporary workers on the demonstration, although he had little confidence that anything would come from the protest. "We should have shut the gates last year," the Bombardier worker said. At the time, however, the workforce were told that the plant had a special order that had to be fulfilled. But the union does nothing, complained his wife, who also came to the demonstration.

The town of Görlitz has experienced continuous decline since the reunification of Germany in 1990. Many local shops and companies have shed workers. "The traditional factories have all been dismantled," Mike said. The social gap is becoming wider and wider. As an ordinary worker you can just about cover the basic costs, but you cannot save anything or afford anything.

A former contract worker from Bombardier came to the demonstration because he does not want the workforce to be divided. He outlined how the principle of hire and fire has long been practiced to shed temporary workers.

"I am an industrial electrician and have also completed additional training, but could only find work

at Bombardier as a temporary worker," he said. "That was in 2015, when suddenly 800 workers were needed because trains had not been finished on time. At the start it was said that our employment was guaranteed until 2018. "Then supplier parts failed to arrive on time, and they sacked all the temporary workers.

For nine years Merten has been a welder at KSC, a supplier to Bombardier. He has his doubts that the IGM is actually fighting for jobs. "They pretend everything is open, but they already know what will happen because they already negotiated it." He had spent his entire life in Görlitz and the region, and feared he would have to move when he loses his job.

Merten responded positively to the leaflet distributed by the Socialist Equality Party at the demonstration and welcomed the formation of action committees. "Such committees must be politically independent," he explained. "Politicians should not be allowed to hold posts on supervisory boards and company executives. They boost their parliamentary salaries while workers get nothing. "Social inequality is taking increasingly blatant forms that are quite unacceptable," he said.



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