

German IG Metall trade union promotes trade war at rally in Berlin

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3 July 2019

On Saturday about 30,000 people took to the streets of Berlin in response to a call by the IG Metall trade union for a change in the country's industrial policy. Germany's biggest trade union used the demo to bang the drum for trade warfare, promote nationalism and prepare the way for mass job losses.

At the start of his speech, IGM chairman Jörg Hofmann outlined the international context of the "change" the union favours. "There are newly emerging economic powers re-organising the global playing field. The spheres of power across our globe are being re-tabulated. This is provoking trade wars and contributes to heightening tensions in already existing trouble spots."

Rather than opposing trade war, IG Metall is intent on pursuing it with all its might. Hofmann called for a "strong European Union" to prevent "imports, such as steel, from being dumped on the European market"—i.e. protectionist measures.

In order to best position the German economy against its global competitors, IG Metall offers to use its extensive bureaucratic apparatus to enforce the necessary layoffs and wage cuts. In his speech, Hofmann made no mention of defending existing jobs, but railed instead against "transformational short-time work," "future arrangements" and "further education."

Millions of workers have made their own painful experience with these policies, which were utilised in past decades to close down the steel industry and other major industries of former East Germany, throwing millions out of work. Since then, IG Metall has used the same methods to replace proper contract jobs throughout Germany and shut down entire workplaces.

Time after time, the union declared such measures were necessary to defend "Germany as a business location." Hofmann sought to further whip nationalism

by claiming that the construction of new factories in Eastern Europe was the source of job losses in Germany.

At the demonstration and subsequent rally members of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) distributed a leaflet outlining the consequences of such nationalist policies. "In order to remain competitive, exploitation must be increased to attract investors, the rate of profit increased, and all labor disputes must be suppressed in order for the country to remain 'attractive' as a business location" the leaflet stated.

To combat this policy the SGP leaflet proposed an international perspective for the working class. "Workers all over the world face the same multinational corporations and financial interests. Therefore, they cannot allow themselves to be divided. They can only defend their rights and gains by coordinating their struggles internationally. This requires a break with the trade unions and the establishment of independent action committees."

Despite a large-scale campaign by the IG Metall, only a fraction of the union's 130,000 works council members and shop stewards attended the rally. There were few rank-and-file union members. Participants reported to the WSWS that many of the 800 chartered buses were half empty, even though travel tickets, which included vouchers for food and drink, were issued free of charge.

The few ordinary workers in attendance expressed skepticism and outright opposition to the right-wing program of the unions.

Christin and Marddin, a couple from Schwerin, both work for a sub-contractor to Airbus. She was engaged in works preparation, he was a painter. They reported on their workplace conditions. Christin said that "nearly the entire workforce is paid far below scale,

even though the corporation returns good profits every year.”

Marddin entered the workplace via a temporary employment agency and therefore receives significantly less than the already underpaid main workforce. “Although I work in shifts and on public holidays, I receive just over half pay,” he said.

Marddin was previously served in the German army for four years, where he worked in logistics and was stationed in Afghanistan, among other places. He was particularly alarmed at the prospect of trade war leading to outright war. “The provocations of the German army (Bundeswehr) against Russia are particularly frightening. Such a conflict would be even worse than Afghanistan,” he said.

André, a forklift driver from Kaltennordheim in Thuringia, rejected the street festival character of the IGM rally. “People should talk to each other here. There should be no beer. You need a clear head.” He also indicated he knew why alcohol was being dished out in the midday sun: “The unions just spout empty words, instead of speaking honestly.” They could not speak out what they truly thought, because they are receiving money from the very same corporations they allegedly oppose.

Responding to the threat of war André replied: “The causes of the wars must be eliminated. They are the reason for the large numbers seeking refuge.” He continued: “If you have all you need, a job and enough money, there is no reason to threaten other people on the streets.”



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