

Airbus works council and IG-Metall demand German leadership in European rearmament

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The German trade unions are playing a decisive role in the country's return to an aggressive foreign policy and comprehensive social militarization. They act as corporate police and the extended arm of management, suppressing any independent movement on the part of workers. They openly support the rearmament of the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) and the European Union, while insisting that Germany lead and dominate the continent militarily.

This is shown by the recent statements of the works council of the Airbus Defence and Space and the IG Metall union on the development of the joint European air combat system FCAS (Future Combat Air System). The FCAS is among the largest European rearmament projects since World War II. In addition to drones, satellites and command-and-control aircraft, it will have a nuclear component and be able to integrate other weapons systems, including those of the Navy. The project is projected to consume at least €300 billion by the time it enters service in 2040. That is equivalent to about 75 percent of the current federal budget.

The union and the works council support this gigantic rearmament project. They demand, however, that Germany assert its national industrial and armaments interests over those of other European countries, above all, France. To the displeasure of IG Metall, only a French prototype has been planned so far for the air combat system. The model is to be developed and built by the French company Dassault, based on the French Rafale fighter.

“Having our own Eurofighter-based demonstrator certified in Germany is of key importance for the German defence industry,” stressed Thomas Pretzl, chairman of the general works council of the military division Airbus Defence and Space. If Germany were to forego its own national model, the “FCAS would

become an industrial policy project primarily for France, financed to a considerable extent by Germany,” he said.

Pretzl's alleged concern for jobs is pure hypocrisy as his arguments are explicitly militaristic. He says that a dedicated demonstrator would offer greater security not only “to German workers” but “also to the Federal Republic of Germany and the Bundeswehr.” In the event of a premature termination of cooperation on the FCAS—tensions have repeatedly arisen between Berlin and Paris in recent weeks—this would ensure that if necessary Germany could continue the project on its own.

Bernhard Stiedl, the primary representative of IG Metall Ingolstadt, struck the same nationalistic-militaristic tone. “Above all, the demonstrator is crucial for transferring the knowledge of the engineers who developed the Tornado and the Eurofighter to the younger generation of engineers,” he said. “If Germany does not build its own demonstrator, this know-how will be lost.”

The unions have supported the return of German militarism and the turn toward an aggressive foreign and great power policy from the beginning. Even before the belligerent speeches of then-Federal President Joachim Gauck and his successor Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) had been closing ranks with the Bundeswehr.

The WSWs commented on the infamous February 2013 meeting between then DGB leader Michael Sommer, the leaders of the eight DGB-affiliated unions and the Ministry of Defence, saying:

“The meeting made clear the central role played by the unions in every sphere of society to advance the

interests of the ruling elite. Not only do they act as co-managers in the companies where they enforce cuts against workers in close cooperation with management in order to maintain the competitiveness of German businesses. They are also increasingly functioning as an extended arm of German foreign and military policy.”

This assessment has been subsequently confirmed. The unions play a key role in the elaboration of rearmament and war policies and their enforcement against the will of the population.

Here are just a few more examples: Reiner Hoffmann, the current president of the DGB, actively participated in the Foreign Ministry’s project “Review 2014—thinking further in foreign policy.” The initiative of then foreign minister and current Federal President Steinmeier was part of the propaganda campaign for a more aggressive role for German imperialism. Its website included an article with the programmatic title: “Germany’s destiny—to lead Europe in order to lead the world.”

Hoffmann’s own contribution also argued for Germany to take a stronger global stance. “Acute crises occurring in many parts of the world repeatedly confront German foreign policy with the need for short-term intervention,” the DGB leader wrote. “We therefore need a forward-looking foreign policy that recognizes crisis potential in time and intervenes preventively.”

Numerous other pronouncements by leading trade unionists leave no doubt that these comments refer specifically to military operations. As early as 2014, Stiedl described the combat drone program pursued by Germany and the EU as a “ray of light” and called for more funding for rearmament: “We feel abandoned by politics. ... During the crisis, there were aid programs for the car and banking industries. We note that these did not happen for the defence industry.”

The union-affiliated Hans Böckler Foundation produces its own strategy papers to advance German-European rearmament and war plans as quickly as possible. “Don’t just watch, help shape,” reads the foreword to “Perspectives of the Defence Technology Industry in Germany” from 2015, for example, adding that a common European foreign and security policy “is still a long way off and procurement is fragmented nationally. But politically, this is the right path, which the European industrial unions also support.”

Currently, the DGB and its individual unions are among the staunchest supporters of the grand coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the SPD, which in the last years has ramped up arms spending from about €32 billion (2014) to more than €50 billion. With the FCAS and other planned armament projects, additional billions will follow. The open warmongering of the trade unions underlines that the fight against militarism, just like the fight against social cuts and the government’s murderous pandemic policies, requires an organizational and political break with the trade unions.



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