

Warning strikes in Germany's metal and electric industries: Workers must take control of the struggle out of the hands of IG Metall!

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The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party–SGP) applauds the militancy of the workers in Germany's metal and electric industries shown in the warning strikes carried out over the past two weeks.

But it is necessary at this stage to make a serious warning. The IG Metall trade union, which called the strikes, is pursuing goals that are totally opposed to those of its members. The union stands firmly on the side of the corporations and is jointly plotting attacks on jobs, wages, workplace benefits, and working conditions.

Workers must mobilize independently of IG Metall, take control of the struggle against job cuts and for wage increases, and put the protection of their health and working conditions into their own hands.

IG Metall is only calling on its members to participate en masse in the warning strikes because they want to tamp down on the tremendous anger that has built up in the factories and other workplaces. Through its tens of thousands of shop floor representatives, the union has cast a large net that responds to the mood in the factories like a seismograph. This early warning system has informed the IG Metall leadership that after a year of the coronavirus pandemic—and after years of job and wage cuts, which are now being intensified—anger is reaching the boiling point.

The trade unions fully supported the return to work following the brief lockdown last year, although nothing had changed with regard to the threat posed by the coronavirus. In the largest factory in the world, the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg, IG Metall and its works council organised a massive show to welcome the restart of production.

Ever since, the workers have been subjected to ever more stressful working conditions due to the constant threat of infection that has multiplied with the evolution of more infectious variants. No statistics are collected on how many thousands of workers have been infected, and how many have died. Workers often only learn by accident if colleagues have tested positive or even died from COVID.

The corporations have exploited the disruption and confusion created by the virus to impose attacks on workers the likes of which have not been seen in Germany since the end of the Second World War. During the lockdown early last year, IG Metall imposed a wage freeze by means of an emergency agreement, and wages were cut still further by the widespread use of the short-term work programme.

By contrast, the companies have cashed in with billions in the form of short-term work payments, loans and other subsidies from taxpayers. At the same time, tens of thousands of jobs were destroyed last year, wages cut, and company pensions gutted and eliminated. All of the agreements and social plans used to impose this were signed off by works council representatives and IG Metall bureaucrats. The end result was multi-billion euro profits for big business during the first year of the pandemic.

But the destruction of jobs is continuing apace. In the auto industry alone, hundreds of thousands of jobs are being sacrificed to boost profits, including at auto and truck makers Daimler, VW, BMW, Ford, MAN, and Opel, and suppliers Continental, Bosch, ZF, and Mahle.

Works council chairs like Bernd Osterloh (VW), Michael Brecht (Daimler), Manfred Schoch (BMW) and Athanasios Stimoniaris (MAN) earn more in a

month than many workers do in a year. They are now sitting down with corporate decision-makers to impose further attacks to enrich shareholders at the expense of the working class.

The job actions now being carried out are cynically being used by IG Metall to compel workers to accept wage cuts once again in this year's round of bargaining. This is the true meaning of the claims by IG Metall heads that the focus in this year's talks is on job security.

During the last bargaining round three years ago, IG Metall began the negotiations by demanding a six percent wage increase and ended up imposing real-terms wage cuts. This time around, it started with a four percent demand and will impose an even greater sellout. The shameless collusion by the unions with management and their subservience to the interests of the shareholders and big capital is encouraging the corporations to make ever more outrageous demands.

The president of the central metal employers' association, Stefan Wolf, demanded prior to the beginning of bargaining at the end of last year, a wage freeze and wide-ranging exit clauses for specific companies so that they can agree to terms that deviate from the central agreement with their respective works councillors.

The companies have not even tabled an offer yet due to the fact that they can be absolutely sure of IG Metall's subservience.

The anger towards IG Metall, its policies and its right-wing works councillors and their close collaboration with management is immense.

But political conclusions must be drawn from this anger. Do not trust IG Metall and its defenders! Nothing will be achieved by replacing one corrupt leadership for another in the unions or works councils. The trade unions in the 21st century do not deserve to be called workers' organisations. They stand on the other side of the barricades. They have dedicated themselves lock, stock and barrel to the interests of the financial markets.

Workers in the metal and electric industries, reject the put-up job organised by the trade unions and corporations in the current bargaining round, and seize the mandate for negotiations from IG Metall! Form rank-and-file action committees in every plant to organise and expand strikes. You are 4 million strong

in Germany's largest industrial sector. You can be sure of the fact that millions more will follow your example. Anger is at the boiling point everywhere.

The coronavirus pandemic has shown that capitalism is incompatible with the interests of the working class and society as a whole. The current warning strikes must be made the starting point for a Europe-wide general strike that not only challenges job cuts and wage reductions, but also demands the shutdown of all nonessential production and secure working conditions to bring the pandemic under control and save tens of thousands of lives. Affected workers must be paid their wages in full. The record profits of big business and the major shareholders, which you have paid for with your jobs, wages, and health, must be confiscated and made available to workers and their families.

Contact us in preparation for this struggle. Support the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei in its campaign for the 2021 federal election and help to build it as the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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