

Defend all auto jobs in Germany and around the world! Break with the IG Metall union and form independent rank-and-file committees! Unite workers internationally!

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei

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Corporations in the auto and supplier industry have declared a war on workers. Not a week goes by without announcements of new mass layoffs from Ford, Opel, Daimler, BMW, Volkswagen, Mahle, Bosch, Continental, ZF and Schaeffler. Each company wants to destroy thousands of jobs in Germany alone.

If they go through with their plans, they will turn entire industrial regions in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hesse into poorhouses, as happened four decades ago with the steel and mining regions in the Ruhr and Saar.

Almost 3.3 million jobs in Germany are directly dependent on the automotive industry. A total of 830,000 people work in production, 1.3 million in the supplier industries and automotive trades, and the rest in automotive sales, service stations and other workplaces. In addition, there are millions more jobs in the service sector that depend indirectly on the automotive industry. If the corporations realize their plans, only a few of them will remain.

A study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) predicted two years ago that 500,000 jobs would be lost in the automotive sector. A more recent study by the Ifo Institute expects 178,000 manufacturing jobs to be eliminated in the next four years alone. Masses of jobs will also be destroyed in other sectors—at Siemens, ThyssenKrupp, BASF and in the shipyards.

This jobs massacre is being justified by technological changes and the switch to electric vehicles. But this is a lie. Technological progress and environmental protection are not the reasons for the destruction of the livelihoods of millions of people. Socially planned and democratically controlled, they could significantly raise the standard of living of all of humanity.

What is really at stake is profit. The global auto companies and their billionaire shareholders are waging a brutal international war for markets on the backs of the workers which is turning ever more openly into trade war and preparations for military war. They are using technological changes and the coronavirus pandemic to exploit workers to the hilt. They are cutting jobs, intensifying levels of exploitation, lowering wages, and closing and relocating entire plants.

The greed of the financial oligarchy knows no bounds. Their

great role model is Tesla, whose stock market value broke through the trillion-dollar barrier this week. The company is now worth more than the next nine auto companies put together. Tesla CEO Elon Musk is the richest man in the world with \$289 billion, ahead of Amazon's Jeff Bezos. Musk became \$464 million richer every day for the past 19 months. While Tesla workers have risked their health and lives in the pandemic, Musk has increased his fortune more than tenfold.

German car companies are emulating Musk. Volkswagen CEO Herbert Diess has called the establishment of a Tesla plant in Brandenburg a "stroke of luck" because it gives VW a new competitor against which it can "measure itself."

In Germany, too, the fortunes of the super-rich have exploded during the pandemic; the 10 richest alone have become 80 billion euros richer. The list is headed by siblings Susanne Klatten and Stefan Quandt, the major shareholders of BMW. Their fortunes rose by 9.2 to 34.2 billion euros.

Workers must prepare for a hard struggle. The corporations will not hand over a cent voluntarily. The capitalist world economy is in a deep crisis. It resembles a Ponzi scheme that will collapse if profits and share prices do not keep rising. Karl Marx's statement that capital is "dead labour, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour" has never been truer than it is today.

More and more workers are becoming aware that a struggle is inevitable. Around the world, resistance is growing. In the US, the largest strike wave in decades is developing. For 40 years, unions there have held back and suppressed labour struggles, but they cannot any longer.

At truck and bus maker Volvo Trucks, auto supplier Dana Inc. and farm equipment manufacturer John Deere, thousands of workers have voted down rotten contracts agreed to by the United Auto Workers union and opted to strike. Labour experts are calling it a "domino effect." "If the strike at John Deere is not settled, another large group will walk off the job. Strikes are contagious."

The strike movement in the US is part of a worldwide upsurge in the class struggle. Metalworkers went on strike recently in South Africa, health care workers in Sri Lanka; and workers in Turkey have occupied a factory owned by auto supplier Mitsuba.

In Germany, too, a storm is brewing, as shown by the strikes of train drivers at Deutsche Bahn, nursing staff at the Charité and Vivantes hospitals, and couriers at delivery service Gorillas, among others.

Break with the unions

Major class struggles are inevitable. But to win, workers must break with the unions. Over the past four decades, these have transformed themselves from reformist workers organizations into paid lackeys of capital.

The IG Metall unreservedly represents the interests of German corporations in the global trade war. It supports the corporate attacks on wages and jobs, as well as the preparations for military rearmament and war. With its army of 50,000 works council representatives and 80,000 shop stewards, it is pushing through the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs and the closure of entire plants against the resistance of the workers.

For example, the Opel plant in Bochum, which once employed 22,000 workers, could not have been closed without the active support of IG Metall (IGM). At Volkswagen, IGM works council representatives agreed five years ago to cut 30,000 jobs in a “pact for the future.” Works council head Bernd Osterloh has been rewarded for this with a board position at truck subsidiary Traton, where he earns two million euros a year, more than an assembly line worker earns in a lifetime.

Now, IG Metall is responding to the growing willingness to fight in the factories by clinging even more closely to the corporate boards and the government. That is the reason behind the rallies “for fair, socio-ecological change in industry” it is calling in more than 50 cities on October 29.

IG Metall is not mobilizing to defend jobs but for “fair burden sharing.” As if the burden could be “fairly shared” between a BMW worker who loses his job and the billionaires Quandt and Klatten! In reality, the demand for “fair burden sharing” is merely the form in which IGM offers the corporations its support in cutting jobs.

While the large corporations have already received billions in government money during the 2009 financial crisis and the coronavirus pandemic, IG Metall is now demanding on their behalf a further cash injection of 500 billion euros in the form of “public investments in the future.”

IG Metall is also offering its services to the incoming German federal government. Through these rallies, it wants to involve itself with “effective publicity in the current coalition negotiations,” it says. In this context, the incoming coalition government, which will likely consist of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Green Party and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), stands unreservedly in the camp of capital. The SPD and Greens, which initiated a comprehensive social counterrevolution under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, are allying themselves with the FDP, the lobby group of the financial oligarchy and the super-rich.

Build independent rank-and-file committees

The class struggle is international. No matter how hard IG Metall and the media try to suppress information about labour disputes in other countries, workers follow the struggles of their international colleagues with solidarity and enthusiasm. They face the same multinational corporations and financial interests around the world. That is why they must not allow themselves to be divided. They can only defend their jobs, rights and achievements if they coordinate their struggles internationally.

This requires a break with the trade unions and that workers establish independent rank-and-file committees. These committees must organize the struggle against plant closures, layoffs and social cuts, and build links with workers at other sites and in other countries.

In May, the International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties initiated the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to create, as we wrote, “new forms of independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces on an international scale.”

Now, it is a matter of building rank-and-file committees in numerous workplaces that will make the defence of jobs a matter of principle. The right to work is a fundamental right. Technological progress must not be subordinated to the profit interests of shareholders and investors. It is a matter of defending the livelihoods of the working class, the only progressive class that can resolve the world’s social problems.

The building of independent rank-and-file committees is directly linked to the struggle for a socialist perspective. Without breaking the power of the financial aristocracy, not a single problem can be solved. Only the expropriation of the corporations and banks without compensation creates the conditions for democratic control over production. Only then is it possible to develop production according to a plan, in the interests of the working class and social needs.

To all workers who want to fight against the attacks of the corporations, we invite you to contact the Sozialistischen Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party), read the *World Socialist Web Site* and subscribe to the *Autoworker Newsletter*. We fight daily for a working-class perspective on the most important political events and inform workers about struggles happening around the world. We will help you form rank-and-file committees and develop international contacts. And we are building the Fourth International as the leadership of the international socialist movement.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact