

IG Metall union bans WSWS leaflet at strike rally in Germany

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The *World Socialist Web Site* regularly reports on the warning strikes that are part of the ongoing collective bargaining in the metal and electrical industries, critically examining the policies of the IG Metall union. Members of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) and WSWS reporters distribute leaflets at rallies, ask workers for their opinions and conduct interviews.

On Tuesday last week, IG Metall in Berlin called a “star march,” starting from several factories and proceeding to a rally in front of the Siemens plant on Nonnendammallee, a large street in Berlin’s northwestern Spandau district. They issued a press release promoting the rally and announcing that IG Metall Berlin head Jan Otto would speak and be available for press interviews afterwards.

WSWS reporters distributed leaflets with the headline, “Collective bargaining in Germany’s metal and electrical industries: Workers call for all-out strike.” No sooner had they started discussing with workers than IG Metall district secretary Philipp Singer showed up and demanded they immediately stop distributing leaflets and speaking to workers. Singer said, “This is an IG Metall rally, I have registered it [with the authorities]. The distribution of the flyers will now cease.”

Singer reacted angrily to the WSWS reporting team’s response that this was a public demonstration and rally where workers had the right to freedom of expression. Rejecting this, the IG Metall bureaucrat declared, “You will leave the rally right now!” The reporters were not intimidated and continued to distribute leaflets and speak with workers who were anxious to voice their concerns.

Singer then called a police officer, to whom he said, “These people are distributing leaflets here that go against the basic idea of the rally. I am the registrant of the rally and I want these people removed.”

Although the WSWS reporters invoked their right to free speech and expression, the police said IG Metall officials had control of the event and asked the reporters to leave the rally.

This attack is aimed not only against the WSWS and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei but above all the working class. It shows that the trade union apparatus is responding to the growing resistance in factories and workplaces with dictatorial methods—something workers everywhere are currently experiencing. In the factories, dismissals, wage cuts and social cuts are elaborated and enforced by the corporatist works councils and the trade unions. Any worker who speaks out against this or even asks critical questions is intimidated, threatened and mercilessly combated.

But resistance to the unions as company police agents is growing, and the WSWS encourages workers not to be intimidated and to build independent rank-and-file action committees to break the control of the union bureaucracy.

The WSWS vigorously opposes IG Metall’s ban on its reporters

talking to workers and the right of workers to air their views.

With the ban, both IG Metall district secretary Philipp Singer and the police are violating a basic democratic right, the right to freedom of expression. Article 5 of the Constitution states: “Everyone has the right freely to express and disseminate his opinion in speech, writing and pictures and to inform himself without hindrance from generally accessible sources. Freedom of the press and freedom of reporting by radio and film are guaranteed. There shall be no censorship.”

Regarding assemblies and demonstrations, the Supreme Court has given an unequivocal ruling: “The fundamental right of freedom of assembly also protects from state interference not only those participants who approve of the aims of the assembly or the opinions expressed there, but equally benefits those who are critical of or opposed to them and wish to express this at the assembly.” (BVerfGE 84, 203, 209, 1 BvR 772/90)

Even more important than the legal considerations are the political ones. Singer and other union apparatchiks are not accusing the WSWS of spreading false facts, their attack is for telling workers the truth.

The leaflet distributed at the IG Metall rally denounces the close collaboration between the unions, employers’ associations and the government, and warns of a sell-out in the contract negotiations.

It states:

Gesamtmittel’s aggressive position is not just the usual collective bargaining poker game but the result of an agreement with the IG Metall union and the German government. Gesamtmittel boss Wolf attended all the tripartite “Concerted Action” meetings that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz convened in the spring.

This alliance of trade unions, employers’ associations and the government is a response to the growing resistance of workers in the face of rapid price increases, unsustainable working conditions in hospitals and schools and mass layoffs in many industrial sectors. The unions and the government are moving closer together to discuss their course of action, forming a veritable conspiracy against the workers. Their goal is to saddle the working class with the gigantic sums for military rearmament and the billion-dollar gifts handed to the super-rich in the pandemic through the imposition of cuts in social spending and wages.

The close collaboration of unions, companies and the capitalist state is not new, but it intensified with the start of the Ukraine war in

February. The federal government used the war as a pretext for the biggest military buildup since World War II. At the same time, sanctions against Russia triggered an explosion in commodity and energy prices, with dramatic effects for consumers and businesses.

The trade unions supported the war policy and the military buildup. At the beginning of March, IG Metall and the Federation of German Industries (BDI) issued a joint statement, signed by IG Metall President Jörg Hofmann and BDI President Siegfried Russwurm. It says: "The top representatives of the Federation of German Industries and the IG Metall, who are also co-founders of the 'Future of Industry' alliance, strongly support the sanctions measures against Russia imposed by the German government, the European Union and the Western allies."

A joint statement by IG Metall Baden-Württemberg and Südwestmetall is even more explicit, saying that Russia's military aggression has required and impressively produced a "united and determined" response from Germany, Europe and its allies.

"We support the measures adopted," both organisations emphasise, leaving no doubt that this also means a dramatic increase in military spending. The sanctions against Russia are expressly welcomed, despite their dire effects on the population. "These measures will demand sacrifices from all of us," the statement says.

One month later, the top representatives of the trade unions met with the heads of the employers' associations in the federal Chancellery and founded the "Concerted Action."

The concrete arrangements and agreements of the Concerted Action are kept strictly secret. But in light of other information, the extent of the conspiracy against the workers becomes clear.

Recently, the Leibniz Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich (ifo Institute) announced that the rapid rise in energy prices in Germany had resulted in a loss of almost 110 billion euros in real income. Accordingly, less could be distributed to workers through collective bargaining and salary negotiations, it insisted. The Institute stressed that it was making these statements against the background of the current round of collective bargaining in the metal and electrical industries.

These are precisely the issues that are being discussed in the Concerted Action. Agreements are being made about how to reduce real incomes and suppress resistance to this. The trade unions play the key role in this conspiracy. In the metal and electrical industries there has been no increase in collectively agreed wages in the past four years.

IG Metall is also preparing a sellout in the current round of collective bargaining. That is why another paragraph in the WSWS leaflet has infuriated the IG Metall bureaucrats:

Listening carefully to the rally speeches of the IG Metall officials at recent strike actions, it is noticeable that they no longer speak of an "8 percent wage increase" but only of "8 percent more money." And when "effective increases in basic rates" are mentioned, it is always without a number being stated. They also no longer even mention the previously demanded contract term of 12 months.

This can only mean that IG Metall is in the process of incorporating the one-off payment of 3,000 euros offered by Gesamtmetall into a new contract, which would lead to further radical reductions in real incomes.

This is exactly what is happening, and the IG Metall bureaucrats are enormously afraid that their reactionary machinations will become known, because then they will lose even the last vestige of influence and control over workers. That is why they call for the police to ban a leaflet and stop discussion with workers. Ideally, these well-paid functionaries, many of whom sit on corporate supervisory boards and collect fat fees, would like to arrest every opponent and throw them in jail.

But if Philipp Singer and Jan Otto think they can reactivate Bismarck's anti-socialist laws or create conditions like those in the Stalinist East Germany (GDR), they are sorely mistaken. The times when workers' every independent movement could be suppressed bureaucratically and dictatorially are over. The days of autocratic and arrogant trade union bureaucrats, who doff their caps to those at the top of society while kicking those at the bottom, are numbered.

Workers' resistance is developing worldwide. The call of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei to build an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is gaining support.

In the US, Will Lehman, an autoworker at Mack Trucks and a socialist, has put himself at the head of this movement. He is running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union based on a fight to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor, through the establishment of a network of rank-and-file factory committees, controlled by workers themselves. His campaign is gaining wide support and recognition among auto and other workers in the US and around the world.

Four core demands are at the heart of Lehman's campaign for UAW president:

- Not reform of the bureaucracy, but its dismantling;
- Abolition of all bodies on which the UAW sits with the employers, and which serve only to grease its machinery;
- Unrestricted workers' control and authority over all collective bargaining, vote counting and regulations affecting workplace safety and security;
- Fight for a programme that includes everything workers need: massive wage increases, automatic adjustment of wages for rapidly rising inflation, equal pay for equal work and comprehensive health and pension benefits for workers and retirees.

Similarly, workers must wrest control from the IG Metall apparatus in Germany. The warning strikes must be used to launch a broad mobilisation. Collective bargaining must no longer take place behind closed doors. In the face of dramatic price increases, workers' assemblies must be called to outline workers' demands and oversee the negotiations.

The attack on the WSWS is directly linked to the fact that IG Metall is once again preparing a drastic cut in real wages in the interests of the government's war policy.

Send protest emails against the IG Metall's action to the WSWS and take part in building independent rank-and-file action committees. Get in touch via Whatsapp message at: +491633378340.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)