

German workers outraged over IG Metall union deal

Our reporter
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On Friday, WSWs reporters spoke with metalworkers in Stuttgart and Berlin about the German IG Metall union's pilot wage agreement in the state of Baden-Württemberg, which includes a significant drop in real wages. They discussed the prospect of building independent rank-and-file committees to defend wages, jobs and workers' social gains, and of joining forces with workers internationally.

There was not a single worker who agreed with the result. Each and every worker was angry. Many were willing to talk only when they realized that those distributing the leaflet were not from IG Metall.

When asked what they thought of the collective agreement, many shouted "bad" as they passed. Those who stopped to talk spoke of rising food and energy prices and other problems they face in their daily lives.

In Feuerbach, one worker said, "Do you think I can pay my rent increase on January 1 with this sorry raise?"

Osman, who has worked at the Bosch factory for 40 years, said he knew from long experience that there would be no 8 percent raise. Always in the past, he said, there had been only half the wage increase the union initially demanded. IG Metall had officially demanded 8 percent, with a contract life of 12 months.

"I was upset from the beginning with the way the union organized warning strikes," Osman said. "We took part in three strikes that were not well organized and for which hardly anyone was mobilized. That showed how poorly they're doing. There was no intention on the part of IG Metall to organize a real struggle. I'll be retired in two years, but the younger generation can't go on like this."

Yasmin spoke to the WSWs only after making sure it was not part of IG Metall. "I work here to finance my family," she said. "Since the coronavirus and the war,

more than two years, it's been hard to keep my head above water."

When she heard what IG Metall had agreed to, she exclaimed, "Outrageous! I would say we need a 15 percent increase, not just a demand, but a real increase."

In Berlin, workers at BMW reacted similarly.

Eric, who works in pre-assembly, said, "The 4.3 percent doesn't really do anything for us. I would have thought they would say, 'No, we won't do that—we'll keep striking!'"

Sandor, an assembly worker, similarly said, "It's not good, it's a shame. I would have pushed harder! I thought we would go on striking..."

Dogukan, who is a temporary worker assembling electric motorcycles, said quietly, but firmly, "They should give us more. Food has become twice as expensive. Something should come back to us for once. I have a family. We don't get paid decently for what we do."

Maura, who is a temporary worker at BMW, said, "We don't know if we're getting anything. There hasn't been a statement about it. I went out of my way to look today—nothing! I think it's good what you guys are doing."

Two young workers from an outside company also said in passing, "IG Metall doesn't fight for us, we know that."

One worker waved us off, saying, "Don't give me IG Metall." It was not until a WSWs reporter said, "We are opponents of IG Metall," that he took a flyer. He liked the suggestion of setting up rank-and-file committees that would network internationally. "I'll read it over," he said.

Another worker excitedly took a leaflet, looked at it closely, and said, "I just went to the works council

about it and asked them what this is all about. They said we should wait and see exactly how they implement it. A spiral of nonsense, the whole thing!”

The day before, WSWs reporters spoke with participants in a warning strike in the south of Berlin. The WSWs’ warning that IG Metall was working closely with the government and employers to sell out the strikes met with a strong response.

Orhan, who works in cylinder head production at Mercedes-Benz Berlin, said, “In the end, it will be maybe 4 percent, I think. It’s all been decided behind our backs. The ink is probably already dry. And our people are often still grateful for it.”

Cemal, who has worked in Mercedes-Benz manufacturing for many years, said, “You can say that inflation is actually 100 percent if you look at food prices. But that is hidden by government statistics. It’s the same everywhere. In Turkey, prices have even risen by 400 percent in some cases.”

Regarding the IG Metall warning strikes, Cemal said, “This is ridiculous. It’s been the same for 40 years: 8 percent is demanded in the end it becomes 2 to 3 percent. A real strike could force the companies to give real wage increases.

“If you shut everything down for a few hours—they can’t get around that. Then you can achieve something. But these two hours here, that doesn’t achieve anything. The employer doesn’t care at all. And right now, industries like the metal and the chemical industries are making billions of euros in profits.”



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