

German trade unions support Israel's genocide in Gaza

Ulrich Rippert
13 November 2023

Last week's call by the *World Socialist Web Site* to mobilise the working class against the bombing and genocide in Gaza states: "The struggle against Israel's genocide in Gaza requires a fight by workers to liberate themselves from the pro-imperialist union bureaucracy."

In Germany, workers are currently seeing just how important this is. The far-right Netanyahu government could not carry out its brutal genocide against the Palestinians without the support of the German government, and the German government could not maintain this support without the close co-operation of the Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB, German Trade Union Confederation) and the leaderships of all the individual trade unions. Thus, the trade unions are directly involved in the worst war crimes.

After the Israeli army had already been bombing the Gaza Strip for days, attacking hospitals, schools and Palestinian neighbourhoods and killing thousands of civilians, and demonstrations against this were taking place in many cities, the German trade unions declared their solidarity with Israel. The DGB Federal Executive Board gathered for a group photo and, together with the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), called for a demonstration at the Brandenburg Gate.

In a letter to Arnon Bar-David, Chairman of the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut, the DGB Federal Executive Board declared its "deeply felt solidarity with Israel in view of the brutal attacks by Hamas." The letter denounced the worldwide protests against the Israeli bombing, saying that the past few days had made clear "how deeply antisemitism is anchored in world society. ... We are shocked and disturbed by the brutality with which antisemitism has become active again—even here in Germany."

The letter ends with the statement that Israel was confronted with a difficult and "challenging situation,"

"and we are pleased that our government has reacted quickly" and had "assured Israel of unrestricted support."

The unions' close collaboration with the German government could hardly be expressed more clearly. It should also be noted that the Israeli trade union organisation Histadrut is closely linked to the Israeli state and the Israeli army.

In addition to the DGB trade unions and the BDA and BDI employers' associations, all the parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament)—apart from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD)—the Protestant and Catholic churches, the German-Jewish Society and many other organisations signed up to the call for the rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate on October 22. The Left Party announced its support for the war several times. It signed not only as a party, but also in the name of its Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

The event served to justify the genocide in Gaza, to intimidate and criminalise those defending the Palestinians and to accelerate Germany's military build-up.

According to the appeal, Israel had "never before" been subjected to such "inhuman violence and brutality." Hamas' October 7 attack against Israel "cannot be justified by anything." Not a word about the brutal expulsion of the Palestinians during the founding of the state of Israel 75 years ago. Not a word about the terror that has been ongoing for decades in the territories occupied by Israel, which has been constantly intensified in recent times.

International law gave "Israel the right to the self-defence of its existence." As if the bombing of residential neighbourhoods with thousands of dead, the majority of them women and children, has anything to do with self-defence.

The appeal warns that there was a threat of the conflict being widened "by Iran and the Hezbollah it supports." In

reality, the US sent two aircraft carrier units with thousands of soldiers to the region immediately after the bombing began and is systematically preparing for war against Iran. The German government is also directly involved with arms deliveries and the deployment of Bundeswehr soldiers in border regions.

Although political parties, trade unions, employers' organisations, churches, and many others had called for a pro-Israel rally, only a few thousand people attended the event at the Brandenburg Gate. Ten times as many people took part in protest demonstrations in support of the Palestinians in several cities the following weekend.

More and more workers are turning against the German government's pro-war policy and understand the direct link between the military build-up, support for the wars in Ukraine and Gaza and the dismantling of democratic rights, on the one hand, and the drastic social spending cuts and reductions in real wages as well as the increase in strikes and diverse protest actions, on the other.

The DGB leadership is reacting to this growing pressure by tying itself even more closely to the government and suppressing any independent movement in factories and offices even more vigorously. Every critical thought and every discussion is to be prevented. For example, the DGB Youth has invited people to an online event on the Gaza war and at the same time announced that it will strictly enforce its right to expel people from the meeting and shut down any form of "antisemitism"—in other words, any criticism of the Netanyahu government's actions and the genocide.

IG Metall is the largest single trade union in the DGB and plays a key role in the current development of the war. It acts as a lobbyist to obtain state funding and lucrative contracts for the German arms companies. At the same time, it deploys its extensive apparatus of full-time works council representatives and shop stewards as company police to suppress any resistance.

Last Tuesday, the vice chairman of IG Metall, Jürgen Kerner, called for more defence contracts for German industry. Speaking at an Airbus action day in Taufkirchen near Munich, Kerner said: "With the purchase of fighter planes and helicopters from the USA, the military aviation industry in Germany is in danger of collapsing."

He welcomed the €100 billion "special fund" for the modernisation of the Bundeswehr, €40 billion of which is earmarked for the air force. However, it was unacceptable "that taxpayers' money was going to the US," criticised the IG Metal vice chair. The government had ordered 35 F-35 fighter jets from Lockheed Martin and further

purchases were in the pipeline, he said. "But whether the Eurofighter will be developed further is written in the stars." The European Tiger helicopter was under threat of being withdrawn from service in Germany. The new transport helicopter would be purchased from Boeing, and the purchase of the US Apache combat helicopter had already been discussed.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the US and German governments are using the genocide in Gaza as a prelude to an all-out war against Iran and other Middle Eastern states. Already waging a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, a second front is emerging in a battle for world power that is escalating into a third world war.

This third world war is taking the form of a global war against the working class. This makes it necessary to break through the straitjacket of the trade union apparatuses in order to combine the struggle for wages and the defence of social gains with the struggle against the government, military armament and war.

This is why the establishment of independent rank-and-file action committees is so important and urgent. Dockers in Hamburg and Bremerhaven, workers at the Cologne-Wahn military airport, workers in the armaments and transport industry, but also workers in all other companies must prepare protests and strike action to block the production and transport of weapons for Israel.

Last week, the Rail Action Committee adopted a call to "Stop all arms shipments to Israel! Stop the genocide in Palestine!" It states: "We, the Rail Action Committee, condemn Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza, which are fully supported by the German government and all parties in the Bundestag."

The Action Committee therefore supports the October 16 call of the Palestinian trade unions to "refuse to build weapons for Israel" and "transport weapons to Israel."

We call on all workers and youth who want to take action against the genocide in Gaza to contact the WSWS and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party). We will help to set up action committees and support fighting measures. Contact us via Whatsapp at this number +49-163-337 8340 and register using the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact