

Germany: IG Metall union supports war credits and rearmament programme costing trillions

Ulrich Rippert
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The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) are rapidly preparing a huge increase in armaments spending, financed by gigantic borrowings, which will be paid for by massive cuts in social spending and wages. The name “special fund” is intended to disguise what it is really about: war credits.

At over €1 trillion, the planned rearmament programme is 10 times as high as the “special fund” for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) that the outgoing coalition government decided on three years ago and described as heralding a “new era.”

The warmongers have lost all inhibitions. Initially, there was talk of an increase in military spending of €400 billion, then of “at least €500 billion.” Now, there is no limit at all to military spending. In addition, there is to be a so-called “infrastructure programme” costing another €500 billion. This will also mainly serve to make Germany “fit for war” again, as Defence Minister Pistorius (SPD) is demanding.

While millions of workers watch the news in bewilderment and horror, the IG Metall union executive board declared its approval immediately after the announcement of the gigantic rearmament programme. In a press statement headlined, “Speed and decisiveness are a good signal,” IG Metall Principal Chairwoman Christiane Benner went on to say, “The special funds and measures that have been announced show that the politicians have understood that we need to act quickly: Politicians have understood that action must now be taken quickly and decisively.”

IG Metall had been calling for “the need for high investment in infrastructure, the energy transition, industry, bridges, railways, roads and education” for some time, she said. Benner seeks to emphasise the improvement of infrastructure but leaves no doubt that she is primarily referring to preparations for trade war and war. She stresses that the “economic, social and geopolitical situation” requires “foresight” and concludes: “We therefore clearly welcome the current initiative.”

In the name of the union and without any discussion or consultation with its members, let alone a vote, the head of IG Metall arrogates to herself the right to support a military build-up and a war programme that can only be compared to the build-

up of Hitler’s Wehrmacht (Armed Forces) on the eve of the Second World War.

Benner thus makes it clear how closely the trade union apparatus is linked to the government and the state apparatus. The union leadership is the instrument with which the government and corporations ensure peace and order in factories and offices, while enforcing mass redundancies and social attacks. This is nothing new, but it has become much more pronounced since the election of Donald Trump as US president.

The aggressive nationalism of Trump’s “America First” policy, the introduction of protective tariffs and trade war measures in defence of national economic interests are magically attracting union bosses—on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the US, Sean O’Brien, head of the Teamsters transport workers’ union, appeared at the Republican Party convention last summer, even before Trump’s election, and gave a speech that was copied from Hitler’s textbook.

After Trump’s inauguration, the president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, Shawn Fain, who had previously supported the Democrats and appeared together with Joe Biden, also switched to Trump’s side. Last week, Fain said, “We look forward to working with the White House to shape the auto tariffs in April in a way that benefits the working class.”

The UAW president knows very well that neither the auto tariffs nor other trade war measures benefit workers, but only serve the interests of the super-rich oligarchs who determine the policies of the Trump administration.

In Germany, all governing parties, past and future, are reacting by accelerating the return of German great power politics. IG Metall’s support for the incoming government’s gigantic rearmament programme shows that the trade unions are also reacting to the rapid political changes here by shifting further to the right.

They are rushing to the aid of the government, which has been thrown into a deep crisis by the Trump administration and its measures. Hardly any other country is as dependent on global trade as Germany, which has long described itself as the world’s leading exporter. The trade war that has begun is

having a catastrophic impact on the German economy.

IG Metall and the other trade unions are ready to fight this brutal trade war on the backs of the working class. Three years ago, at the beginning of the Ukraine war, it fully supported the government's war policy as part of the corporatist "Concerted Action" and has since pushed through brutal wage cuts and redundancies in order to strengthen German companies in the trade war and squeeze billions for armaments out of the workforce. Now, the unions are taking their efforts to an even higher level.

Hundreds of thousands of jobs are to be cut: At least 35,000 at VW, 20,000 at Mercedes, 11,000 at Thyssenkrupp Stahl. Thousands of jobs are also on the line at Ford, Opel, Audi and Porsche, and at suppliers Bosch, ZF, Continental, Schaeffler, etc. The same applies to the mechanical engineering and chemical industries, construction, the railways, the public sector and postal service. No sector will be spared, with 40 percent of companies planning to cut jobs this year. In industry, the figure is even higher.

Workers are prepared to fight against this. But the trade union apparatuses everywhere are trying to suppress the willingness to fight and to prevent and sabotage industrial action.

The EVG railway workers' union recently agreed to cuts in real wages and a 33-month strike ban for over 190,000 Deutsche Bahn employees without organising a single warning strike.

In the current wage negotiations in the public sector, at Deutsche Post and Berlin's public transport company (BVG), Verdi is also trying to push through job cuts and wage reductions.

In the automotive industry, IG Metall has set the course at VW, the flagship corporation for Germany's much-vaunted "social partnership." The union and the works council it dominates have agreed to the biggest job losses and wage cuts since the Second World War. In addition to the destruction of 35,000 jobs, real wages will be reduced by up to 20 percent. The works council at Mercedes has just concluded a similar agreement for over 90,000 Mercedes employees.

The bloated trade union bureaucracy and its army of staff and works council reps act like a corporate police force. Toothless noisy protests serve the purpose of letting the growing opposition among workers to the attacks run into the ground. Workers who rebel against this are put under pressure to silence them.

It is urgently necessary to break this dictatorship of the trade unions in the companies. The integration of the unions into the government and their support for the policies of rearmament and war are not simply a result of the—undoubtedly widespread—corruption of the trade union bureaucrats. Rather, this development, which is not limited to Germany, has deep objective causes.

Globalisation—the worldwide integration of the economy and transnational production processes—has deprived the trade

unions of the national ground upon which they were able to agree to limited social reforms in the past. Now, in the battle for raw materials, sales markets and cheap labour, they are backing the German corporations and government without reservation, dividing workers and supporting rearmament and war.

The right-wing development of the trade unions knows no bounds. Their support for the horrendous war credits and their co-operation with the presumed future chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU) means that they too—as Merz and the CDU/CSU already made clear during the election campaign—are prepared to co-operate with the right-wing extremists in order to push through the policy of rearmament to fight war abroad, and stepping up the powers of the state to repress all opposition at home.

This is why the establishment of independent rank-and-file action committees is now of great importance and urgency. The common front of government, corporations and trade unions must be countered by the international unification of the working class. Those who create all the wealth in society and bear the entire burden of war and crisis must intervene independently in political events and oppose the big banks and corporations as well as their henchmen in the government.

The declaration of the IG Metall executive board in support of the war credits makes it clear that the struggle against rearmament and war cannot be waged with, but only against, the trade union apparatuses and their control in the workplaces.

The attacks from above must be countered by the struggle of the working class from below. By building independent action committees, it is possible to unite workers across all borders and fight for a perspective that places the rights and interests of the working class above the profit interests of investors, speculators and the super-rich.

Last year, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) called for the struggle against job cuts to be coordinated worldwide and directly linked to the fight against war and rearmament, "because the race for raw materials, markets and supply chains is driving US and European imperialism to war."

The WSWS is calling on all readers to take part in setting up independent action committees in the face of the intense arms build-up. Now is the time to take action to prevent a catastrophe.



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