

“Action Day” of Germany’s IG Metall Union: A nationalist spectacle promoting Berlin’s war course

Our reporters
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On March 15, the German industrial union IG Metall (IGM) held a nationwide “day of action” in five cities. The event, announced well in advance, took place on the day after the establishment parties—the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens—agreed to fund a massive rearmament program. What was billed as a “wake-up call for secure work” and a protest against industrial cutbacks, instead turned into a nationalist spectacle and an endorsement by IG Metall of Berlin’s war course.

IG Metall chairwoman Christiane Benner (SPD), who spoke in Hanover, explicitly backed Berlin’s plans for a so-called special fund, financed on credit. “It is good that the politicians have shown that they have understood,” said Benner. Now “all political forces must take responsibility to ensure that this central project does not fail.”

Jürgen Kerner, Second Chairman of IG Metall, who gave the keynote speech in Stuttgart, expressed similar sentiments. “Politicians have woken up, recognized the seriousness of the situation and are striking out in the right direction,” Kerner said.

Trade union leaders everywhere praised the easing of the so-called “debt brake,” which limited governments from running a deficit, and gave nationalistic speeches in support of domestic industry. Above all, they demanded “an affordable energy price” and that “politicians must deliver this now.”

None of IGM’s banners opposed Germany’s rearmament and war plans. Not a single IG Metall spokesperson on stage criticized the military madness, leveling no critique against armament programs that will swallow up to a trillion euros to arm the Bundeswehr (the German armed forces) and make the infrastructure “war-ready.”

In Stuttgart, a person carrying a sign reading “No to war” and “History repeats itself” was refused entry to the event, with the assistance of the police. This symbolic incident illustrates the transformation of IG Metall into a police force

for the state and corporations against workers.

IG Metall chartered special trains and several hundred buses to bring its bureaucrats, shop stewards and works councilors to the events, along with workers from the factories. They were provided with plentiful beer, whistles and IG Metall vests and scarves on the way, to warm them up for the occasion.

According to the union, there were around 81,000 participants from IG Metall and IG BCE (a union for mining, chemistry and energy workers) in total. This included 25,000 in Stuttgart, 23,000 in Cologne, 12,000 in Frankfurt am Main, 12,000 in Leipzig and 9,000 in Hanover. These figures were likely exaggerated. Our reporters in Leipzig estimated the number of participants at a maximum of 5,000, and in Cologne there were likely far fewer than claimed. By way of comparison, it should be noted that there are around 3.9 million workers in the metal and electrical industry in Germany.

The works council chairmen of Ford, Thyssenkrupp and Hüttenwerke Krupp Mannesmann (HKM) spoke at the Deutzer Werft shipyard in Cologne. As these companies are all threatening mass redundancies, the speakers attempted to rally nationalism and local site politics. In the style of Donald Trump, IG Metall chief treasurer Nadine Boguslawski demanded that whoever wants to sell cars in Germany should also create jobs in Germany. This was a not-so-subtle attack on China.

However, the further one moved away from the union cheering squads at the stage, the more clearly a completely different mood emerged. The most common reaction to the 1 trillion euro war loans was: “They’re crazy in Berlin.”

Cem, a metalworker from the city of Neuss, raised the question: “What danger are they talking about?” He felt threatened above all by Germany’s rearmament itself. “Now VW is supposed to produce armaments again, that’s crazy. My colleague at work has already said, ‘We’ve seen all this in Germany in the 1930s.’ This has to be prevented!”

Two Thyssenkrupp steelworkers from Duisburg were skeptical about the future. “I’ve been at Thyssen for forty years,” said the first. “We used to wage serious fights, but IG Metall hasn’t been able to win anything for us for a long time. They’ve completely lost our trust.” That is why most of their younger colleagues did not come to the rally, they explained.

Both workers assessed the situation as threatening. They had often experienced redundancies at Thyssen, but “it is different today.” A younger worker pointed to job cuts at the Ford plants, in the steel industry, at VW and in the chemical industry and said that he had started as a temporary worker at Thyssenkrupp. “We don’t even know if we’ll get a retirement.”

Both workers were interested in the idea of building internationally networked Action Committees under the direct control of the workers. One said, “We have to all fight together.” Both spoke out against the government’s rearmament and war policy. “Now the German army is even in Lithuania,” said one of them. “And when you see how Rheinmetall is making profits, it’s really just sick.”

Dino, Murat and Raffaele work at Thyssenkrupp Stahl in the city of Kreuztal-Ferndorf. They reported that their plant is closely linked to the Thyssenkrupp site in Kreuztal-Eichen, which is due to close in 2026. The three cannot imagine that their site will survive without the one in Eichen. The workers and their 1,000 colleagues at both sites could become victims of the planned 11,000 job cuts at Thyssenkrupp Stahl.

Dino pointed out that the profitable defense division TK Marine Systems is to be sold off and said that further dismemberment of the group as a whole threatened to destroy the entire steel division. “It is important that the Group remains together,” he said. When Knut Giesler, IGM district manager for North Rhine-Westphalia, took to the stage and spoke, Murat commented, “That is the man who promised us that the plant in Eichen would not be closed. He didn’t keep his promise.”

On the sidelines of the Frankfurt rally where delegations from the Rhine-Main region, from the German states of Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland. Many who were in attendance were likewise opposed to Germany’s war course.

Like Bendix is a young chemical worker from the Höchst Industrial Park. He is completely against Germany’s rearmament because he is against war and fascism, he explained. He is very interested in history, especially the history of IG Farben union. Bendix reported with concern that he was constantly finding traces of the Nazi past resurfacing.

Andreas, an older IG Metall worker from Mannheim, also

recalled, “30 years ago, we in the union campaigned for the conversion of armaments factories into civilian production plants. Today, the exact opposite is being done.” He explained that he worked in rail vehicle construction. The same group (Bombardier Alstom) also owns the plant in Görlitz, which has just been sold to an armaments company.

Andreas said, “This transformation must be terrible for my colleagues. It certainly would be for me. The weapons will be used at some point.” The argument about saving jobs is really weak, he continued. “In Görlitz, only 300 or 400 out of 800 workers will be kept on, so it’s not even good for the jobs. The plant in Görlitz has existed for 175 years, our plant in Mannheim for 110 years.”

Kevyn, who has been working at Saarlust in Völklingen since 2010, explained that he came to the rally because “I wanted to see clearly where things are heading. In Saarland, all the metal companies are cutting jobs and all the workers are worried about their livelihoods. The number one priority is always profit and people come last.” He views the plans of the CDU/CSU and SPD in Berlin with concern. “Nobody wants war. And [incoming German chancellor Friedrich] Merz was the last thing we needed.” He thought it was wrong to supply Ukraine with Taurus cruise missiles, as Merz has demanded.

“I didn’t know what to vote for in the elections this time. I couldn’t really get behind any party,” Kevyn continued. “It must be possible to bring the economy and the people together. But people always fall by the wayside.”

In Stuttgart, Stephan, who works at Bosch, said he used to be a member of the Green Party, but left five years ago. “The Greens are no different than the other parties. They used to speak out against war and in favor of the environment and refugees. But now nothing they say is acceptable to me.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) urges metalworkers to unite independently of the IG Metall bureaucracy through the establishment of Action Committees in every factory. The working class must link up the fight against job cuts and war on an international and socialist basis. Get in touch via our WhatsApp number +49 163-3378 340 or register here using the form below this article!



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