

# German trade union federation calls for support for the new right-wing government

## Join the Fourth International's online May Day celebration!

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The support expressed by the leaders of the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) for the coalition agreement, preparations for war and militarisation of society of the new German government—a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), and Social Democratic Party (SPD)—fatally recalls the support given to the Nazi regime by the ADGB (General German Trade Union Federation) in its appeal of May 1, 1933.

At that time, Hitler established a dictatorship, SA gangs terrorised militant workers, the German Communist Party (KPD) was banned and hundreds of communists, social democrats and trade unionists were abused in the first concentration camp in Dachau. Nevertheless, the ADGB called on workers to participate in the May Day demonstrations under the swastika and offered its cooperation to the Nazi regime.

Under the headline “Ready to cooperate in building the state, the economy and the nation!” the ADGB wrote in 1933:

We have emphasised more than once in the past that trade unions have their natural tasks to fulfil in every economic environment and in every state. These tasks are: safeguarding social rights and representing the economic interests of the working class. In defending and fulfilling these tasks, we must seek cooperation with every government. Accordingly, we must also take a positive stance towards the current government!

The consequences of this reactionary subservience are well known. The ADGB leadership's strict refusal to organise a general strike, which many workers demanded, encouraged the Nazi regime to launch brutal attacks. On May 2, 1933, the trade union buildings were occupied by the SA and the trade unions were smashed.

Today, the reactionary, nationalist role of the trade union leaders is once again clearly evident. Although the new federal government, which will be sworn in on May 6, has decided on a gigantic rearmament programme, is planning massive social and wage cuts and is paving the way for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) with its law-and-order policy and attacks on

migrants, the DGB praises the coalition agreement and is offering its cooperation and support to the right-wing government led by Friedrich Merz (CDU) and Lars Klingbeil (SPD). The DGB would also be prepared to cooperate with an AfD government.

Unlike in 1933, however, the working class today is not defeated and the fascists are not in power. The struggle for power with the ruling class still lies ahead and it is necessary to prepare for major, worldwide class struggles.

Therefore, workers must take part in the international online rally on May Day organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International this coming Saturday. We are fighting to unite workers from the United States, Europe and around the world in the struggle against fascism, dictatorship and war.

“The coalition agreement contains smart and sensible plans to boost the economy and secure jobs,” DGB chair Yasmin Fahimi declared in media reports and interviews. “Finally, there are clear prospects for workers and growth.”

Fahimi expressly supports the trillion-euro war credits, euphemistically referred to as an “investment fund,” even though these funds serve to make Germany “fit for war.” The planned special fund has “already sent decisive signals for the provision of an efficient infrastructure,” the DGB chairwoman explained, adding: “We therefore expect the future government to now tackle the necessary investments quickly and decisively.”

Her colleague at the helm of the IG Metall (IGM) union, Christiane Benner, told *Der Spiegel* on Tuesday that it would be “a disaster” if the formation of the government failed. The coalition agreement contains “many good elements” that “must now actually be implemented.” The IGM does see “critical points in the coalition agreement, but no alternative to it.”

Benner enthusiastically supports the new government's plans for a major role as world player. She emphasises that a “common position in Europe” must be found “in economic and security policy. ... Germany must speak with a strong voice within Europe, and Europe in turn must speak with a strong voice worldwide.”

The IG Metall chairwoman is pressing for an aggressive stance in the trade war with the US. She said the future German government must take a “united stance” towards the US and not abandon the American market. “At the same time, we at IG Metall are calling on companies, including their supervisory boards, to look for new markets.” There are still “growth markets outside

China and the US.” For example, one must ask oneself “why Chinese suppliers are much more strongly represented in the South African market than German ones,” Benner emphasised.

Back in March, when the outgoing Bundestag passed its gigantic rearmament programme for trade war and war, Benner applauded loudly. She declared that the “economic, social and geopolitical situation” required vision and concluded: “We therefore clearly welcome the current initiative.”

The trade unions will play a key role for the incoming government in implementing its planned social attacks. Benner and Fahimi embody a trade union apparatus which has completely aligned itself with the government and big-business lobby and acts as a force to discipline workers. Fahimi was general secretary of the SPD and state secretary in the Ministry of Labour before taking over the leadership of the DGB.

The role of union leaders as a fifth column of their respective governments has intensified significantly since Donald Trump took office in the United States. The aggressive nationalism of Trump’s “America First” policy, the introduction of protective tariffs and trade war measures to defend national economic interests, has a magical attraction for union bosses on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the United States, the president of the Teamsters transport workers’ union, Sean O’Brien, appeared at the Republican Party convention last summer and gave a speech virtually copied from the Hitler playbook.

Following Trump’s inauguration, the president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, Shawn Fain, who had previously supported the Democrats and appeared alongside Joe Biden, also switched to Trump’s side.

The DGB leaders’ support for the coalition agreement and the incoming government’s gigantic rearmament programme shows that the trade unions here are also responding to dramatic political changes with a further shift to the right. They are rushing to the aid of a right-wing government that is in deep crisis. Hardly any other country is so dependent on world trade as Germany. Trump’s trade war measures are having a catastrophic impact on the German economy.

IG Metall and the other trade unions are ready to wage this brutal trade war on the backs of the workforce. Three years ago, at the beginning of the Ukraine war, they fully backed the government’s war policy as part of their Concerted Action program with the last government. Since then, they have pushed through brutal wage cuts and layoffs to strengthen German companies in the trade war and squeeze billions out of workers for rearmament. Now they are accelerating this course.

Hundreds of thousands of jobs are to be cut: at least 35,000 at VW, 20,000 at Mercedes, 11,000 at Thyssenkrupp Steel. Thousands of jobs are also on the line at Ford, Opel, Audi and Porsche, at Bosch, ZF, Continental, Schaeffler and countless smaller companies. The same is in store for the mechanical engineering and chemical industries, the construction industry, the railways, the postal service and the public sector. No sector will be spared. Forty percent of German companies plan to cut jobs this year and in industry, the figure is even higher.

The workforce is prepared to fight back, but the trade union

apparatuses everywhere are trying to suppress this militancy and prevent and sabotage industrial action.

In February, the railway workers’ union EVG undermined the resistance of 190,000 Deutsche Bahn employees and pushed through real wage cuts and a 33-month strike ban. This was followed by the agreement at the postal service, where Verdi signed a sell-out against the majority vote of 56 percent of employees. Public sector workers experienced the same thing when Verdi accepted the miserable arbitration result of Merz’s friend Roland Koch. And just last week, Verdi also enforced the arbitration result at the Berlin transport company BVG, even though 95.4 percent of its members had voted in early April for an indefinite full strike.

It is urgently necessary to break this dictatorship of the trade unions in the workplaces. The class struggle from above must be countered by the struggle of the working class. That is why it is so important to build independent action committees to unite workers across all borders and fight for a perspective that puts the rights and interests of workers 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 coordination of the struggle against job cuts worldwide and for its direct connection to the struggle against war and rearmament, “because the race for raw materials, markets and supply chains is driving US and European imperialism to war.”

The next important step in the struggle for the worldwide unification of the working class against trade war, fascism and war is the International Online May Day Rally of the International Committee of the Fourth International this coming Saturday.

This year’s May Day rally will present a socialist programme to unite workers internationally against capitalism. It will outline a revolutionary perspective for ending imperialist violence and building a society based on equality and human needs.

Register here and support us financially with a donation. Help us publicise the rally as widely as possible to build a powerful movement against fascism and war!



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