

# May Day rallies: German Trade Union Federation closes ranks behind new right-wing federal government

Christoph Vandreier  
4 May 2025

At this weekend's May Day rallies, the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) and its affiliated unions declared their full support for the new right-wing coalition government—comprising the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU)—and its insane policy of rearmament.

While workers responded to this spectacle with widespread disgust and largely stayed away, various pseudo-left groups turned out to cheer on the trade union bureaucrats—which did nothing to change the minimal participation at the rallies.

DGB chair Yasmin Fahimi, a former secretary general of the SPD, spoke at the Karl Marx monument in the city of Chemnitz to an audience of fewer than a thousand union officials and retirees. She explicitly welcomed the new government's "special fund," aimed at making Germany "fit for war." "The decision to amend the country's Basic Law in order to create financial leeway for this was right and necessary," Fahimi declared.

The €500 billion "special fund" for infrastructure, along with unlimited sums for war and rearmament, will not create jobs or improve workers' lives, as the DGB chairwoman claims. Rather, these funds are aimed at transforming Germany once again into a major military power, capable of waging war against Russia "within three to five years," as Defense Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) has announced.

Workers will pay for these plans with their jobs, wages and ultimately their lives. The trade unions are among the principal driving forces behind trade war and militarism, transforming the International Working Class Day of Struggle into a nationalist spectacle.

In the United States, the unions are backing Trump's tariff policies, while in Germany they are calling for

retaliatory measures from the government and demanding "loyalty to specific locations" from corporations, as Fahimi put it. "The answer to 'America First' can only be 'Europe United'!" she told her audience.

The trade union bureaucrats were not content merely to pledge their support for the new federal government, led by former BlackRock manager Friedrich Merz (CDU); they also provided a platform for numerous representatives of the two ruling parties.

Federal Development Minister Svenja Schulze (SPD) spoke in Hamm; Potsdam's Minister of Economic Affairs Jörg Steinbach (SPD) in Potsdam; SPD Mayor Mike Josef in Frankfurt; Minister-President Mario Voigt (CDU) in Erfurt; and Minister-President Hendrik Wüst (CDU) in Siegburg.

In recent days, the SPD and CDU have agreed on a coalition committed to waging war on the working class. To claw back more than a trillion euros in war credits, they are preparing sweeping attacks on jobs, wages and social benefits.

The trade unions stand ready to enforce this austerity program against workers. They have already demonstrated this through the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs in the auto and supplier industries and through the betrayal of contract struggles in the public sector and postal service. These aims were reaffirmed at the May Day rallies.

Workers are rightly turning their backs on this reactionary spectacle. According to the DGB, just 310,000 people attended all 420 rallies and events—a figure that is clearly inflated. What were once powerful May Day demonstrations bringing millions into the streets to fight for their rights and against capitalism have long since degenerated into bratwurst feasts for union bureaucrats.

The trade unions are receiving support from the Left Party and the various pseudo-left groups within and around their ranks. Left Party leader Ines Schwerdtner appeared alongside Fahimi at the central rally in Chemnitz, while Left Party figurehead Gregor Gysi spoke in Solingen.

The Left Party itself bears direct responsibility for sweeping social cuts at the state level and has approved the trillion-euro war credits in the *Bundesrat*.

Beginning on May 2, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which is affiliated with the Left Party, is hosting a three-day conference in Berlin titled “Trade Union Struggles as a Response to the Shift to the Right, Transformation and Austerity Policies.” At this event, union-affiliated representatives of the Left Party and various pseudo-left groups will gather to strategize on how to keep the bureaucracy intact, provide it with left-wing cover and prevent workers from organizing independently.

Several dozen working groups will discuss topics under headings such as: “Become visible! How to stage impressive actions,” “Why unions?” “Upswing despite headwinds: The renewal of US unions,” “Shaping transformation with (future) contracts?” “Putting pressure on politics,” and “Sustainable development of workplace groups and shop steward structures.”

The various pseudo-left groups within and around the Left Party play a particularly duplicitous role, cloaking the right-wing spectacle in left-wing rhetoric.

The Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO) calls on workers and youth to participate in the DGB rallies, listen to the speeches of government officials and union bureaucrats, and claims this is the way to fight “against rearmament, racism and cuts.” The RIO is the German affiliate of the Morenoite “Trotskyist Fraction,” which broke with Trotskyism decades ago.

The Socialist Alternative (SAV), affiliated with the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), even claims that the trade unions could, like the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution, stop war and overthrow capitalism. According to the SAV, the key to this is for workers to rejoin the unions. “In the current situation, organising the unorganised is a central task of the trade unions,” it writes, adding that “full-time organisers in key companies” could play an “important role” in this effort.

The Socialist Organisation Solidarity (SOL) has likewise made it its goal to stem the decline in trade union membership. It argues that the Left Party must play a key role in this effort by criticizing the “social partnership orientation” of the “top union bureaucracy.” Only in this

way, SOL claims, is it possible to prevent “more and more members from turning their backs on the trade unions out of disappointment.”

In this process, it falls to the Left Party to carry out the dirty work. The same party that oversaw the restoration of capitalism in eastern Germany, defends Israel’s so-called “right to self-defense” and supports the war against Russia, is now presented as the force that will transform the pro-war, pro-austerity trade unions into organs of class struggle!

In reality, the alliance between the trade unions and the government is not simply the result of the undeniable corruption of “top bureaucrats.” The unions have always stood on the right wing of the labour movement, responding to the crisis of capitalism by aligning themselves with the ruling class.

In 1914, they declared a “civil peace” to suppress working-class opposition to the First World War and sent their own members to the front lines. On May 1, 1933, they even marched under the swastika and offered their collaboration to Hitler—who, emboldened by their cowardice, ordered the storming of union headquarters the very next day.

Since the 1980s, the globalization of production has stripped the trade unions of their former basis of operation—compromises with capital within the national framework. In response, they have transformed from reformist, pro-capitalist workers’ organizations into co-managers and enforcers for corporations and governments. As a result, they are increasingly despised by broad sections of the working class.

To defend their basic rights and stop the drive to war, workers must break with the trade union apparatus and build their own independent action committees. These committees must be unified internationally through the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), to oppose growing nationalism and trade war policies with the international unity of the working class.

But this is not merely an organizational question. Breaking with the trade unions and pro-capitalist parties such as the Left Party requires a political clarification and a socialist perspective.



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**