

Germany: Three construction workers fall to their death

Marianne Arens

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On Tuesday afternoon May 20 three construction workers fell to their deaths from a great height at a bridge construction site near Horb in the Neckar Valley, south of Stuttgart. As they were being hoisted up to their workplace on a bridge pier in a man-sized cage attached to a crane the steel cable above them snapped and the cage plummeted. Firefighters and emergency services were only able to confirm the death of the three men.

The construction workers killed, two Polish and one German, were aged between 40 and 46. They were part of a crew working on one of the most important major construction sites in the state of Baden-Württemberg. At a height of up to 90 metres, a motorway bridge for the B32 is being built over the Neckar River to keep traffic out of the small town of Horb (Freudenstadt district), which lies in the valley.

While Germany's Transport Minister Patrick Schnieder (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and Baden-Württemberg Transport Minister Winfried Hermann (Greens) issued statements of condolence and shed crocodile tears, the construction company responsible, Porr from Munich, which had already worked on the Stuttgart 21 rail project, quickly pushed for work to resume at the construction site. Work is scheduled to resume on Monday, even though the causes of the accident have not yet been clarified.

The main unanswered question is the condition of the broken suspension cable that connected the gondola to the crane. Such steel cables are normally susceptible to corrosion, i.e. they are not rust-proof, and must therefore be checked regularly. It is also striking that the transport gondola was attached to only one cable and that there were no other safety devices.

This horrific accident shines a particularly harsh light on the neglect of safety at the construction site, which

turned it into a death trap. As was announced on 28 April, known as Workers' Memorial Day, three to four people die every day in Germany as a result of accidents at work. Four railway workers have died in accidents at work over the last four weeks. As for construction workers, they are particularly prone to serious and fatal accidents at work. According to the German Construction Industry Association, there were over 90,000 accidents at work in the construction industry last year, resulting in 78 deaths, i.e., significantly more than one per week.

Construction workers, who frequently come from different countries and are often employed through subcontractors, have no lobby to look after their safety.

The IG BAU trade union and the DGB trade union confederation have been hypocritically participating in the international Workers' Memorial Day for several years, but only commemorate the victims of workplace accidents once a year, at most with a public statement and a memorial service for the dead. At the same time, the unions are welcoming Germany's new government, a coalition of the CDU and Social Democrats, which will undoubtedly further weaken occupational safety.

Robert Feiger, federal chairman of the Industrial Union of Construction, Agriculture and Environment (IG BAU), has expressly welcomed the government's plan to spend a trillion euros mainly on armaments. Based on the 500 billion euros planned for infrastructure projects Feiger said, "finally it is possible to tackle broken bridges, dilapidated railway tracks, bumpy roads, schools, daycare centres and hospitals in need of renovation, missing energy infrastructure and much more" while creating more planning security.

Feiger did not mention the devastating impact of the government's war policy. In reality, the money is intended to make bridges, roads and infrastructure "fit

for war,” as Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) demands.

The International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on workers themselves to contribute their knowledge and experiences and share them through independent action committees. The latest spate of horrific industrial accidents can only be properly investigated by workers acting independently of politicians, entrepreneurs and trade union bureaucrats. The aim must be to reveal the causes of such accidents in detail and take joint action to remedy the abuses!

The IWA-RFC recently began an independent investigation into a workplace death: the fatal accident at a Stellantis plant in the US six weeks ago in which Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old skilled tradesman, was killed while servicing a cleaning robot. During this entire time, neither management nor the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) nor the United Auto Workers union have shared any information with the family and the public about the cause of the tragedy.

As one autoworker stated, “A worker dies, and a day later, the story is forgotten. And the union leadership is part of the problem.”



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