

# Germany's trade unions use "Anti-War Day" to spread war propaganda

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It is nothing new that the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) and its member unions support the government's pro-war policies. Their leading functionaries have already repeatedly taken part in meetings of the corporatist "Concerted Action" at the Chancellery.

But the fact that on the 86th anniversary of Germany's invasion of Poland, that is, the beginning of the Second World War, the DGB called rallies in the name of its member unions supporting military rearmament and spreading war propaganda marks a new stage in the shift to the right by the trade unions.

It shows how deeply the apparatus of the trade unions is integrated into government policy and how urgent it is to build independent rank-and-file action committees to break the bureaucratic control of the unions and link the fight against sackings and social cuts with the fight against militarisation and war preparations.

The DGB's call for the rallies on "Anti-War Day" begins with a few hackneyed phrases about "multilateral conflict resolution" within the framework of the UN "through diplomacy and effective crisis prevention," followed by complaints about the "rebirth of a disastrous logic of thought and action," which replaced the "strength of international law" with the "law of the strongest." Then follows government propaganda, word for word.

The German government has exploited Trump's election victory in the US to launch a reckless military build-up costing over one trillion euros. It justifies this by claiming that with Trump as President, European security interests can no longer be guaranteed, and that Germany must therefore make a strong military contribution to Europe's rearmament. In this way, Europe, as an alleged "power for peace," could intervene in the growing conflicts between the US, China and Russia.

In reality, the German government is not pursuing a peace policy but a war policy. It is using Trump's election to return to great-power politics, which it has long been preparing, and to enforce its own economic interests by force, just as German imperialism did in the First and Second World Wars.

The DGB blames the "great-power competition between the US, China and Russia" for the fact that "interests are being pursued by military force" and that "military aggression is seen as a legitimate means of politics." "In their struggle for geopolitical and geoeconomic influence, they are pushing a policy of confrontation and bloc-building," the DGB accuses them.

The European and German powers, by contrast, are portrayed as

mere victims of this development, true angels of peace. The DGB laments that "the alliance with the US" can "no longer be relied upon." As if leading representatives of the German government had not been advocating for years that Germany, the world's third-largest economy, should once again play a global political role commensurate with its economic weight.

The DGB refers to Russia as a "great power" and warns that the European Union (EU), with its ten times higher gross domestic product (GDP), will become "the plaything of rival great-power interests." From this it derives its support for German militarism: "The DGB and its member unions therefore do indeed see the need to strengthen joint defence capabilities in Germany and Europe." That is the key sentence of the DGB statement.

While the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) puts up recruitment posters everywhere depicting combat soldiers and bearing the slogan "How far will you go for our democracy?" the DGB call on "Anti-War Day" concludes: "We need a clear and joint commitment to what it is really about when strengthening our own defence capability—namely the defence of our liberal democracy..."

Already 12 years ago, in spring 2013, then DGB head Michael Sommer and the leaders of the eight DGB unions met with then Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). At a joint press conference, they declared that the meeting marked the start of an intensified dialogue between the DGB and the Bundeswehr. Close cooperation was planned.

At the time we wrote:

The alliance between the unions and the Bundeswehr is a warning for the working class. The unions are making it clear that they are not only willing to control and police workers in the factories. They are also prepared to support the use of military force to suppress the resistance of the working class.

Since then, cooperation between the government, union leaders and the army has only grown. When rearmament was accelerated two years ago with a €100 billion "special fund" for the Bundeswehr, the DGB responded enthusiastically. It described rearmament as a stimulus programme. Immediately after, when the then-Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) declared a "new era" in defence and foreign policy, the IG Metall

union and the Federation of German Industries (BDI) issued a joint statement, emphasising:

The top representatives of the Federation of German Industries and the IG Metall, who are also co-founders of the “Future of Industry” alliance, strongly support the sanctions measures against Russia imposed by the German government, the European Union and the Western allies.

The IG Metall executive not only supports the war hysteria against Russia, it has also declared itself willing to pass the devastating economic consequences of the sanctions policy—exploding fuel and energy prices, high inflation, redundancies, short-time working and wage cuts—onto the workers and suppress any resistance to them.

Since then, hardly a day has passed without mass redundancies, plant closures, wage reductions and social cutbacks being announced in the core industrial sectors—in particular, the auto, supplier and chemical industries, as well as in almost all areas of administration. The union suppresses every attempt at resistance, sabotages every serious joint struggle and isolates it in fruitless protests.

The government is passing the costs of rearmament onto the population with massive social attacks. Chancellor Friedrich Merz has declared that the welfare state is “no longer affordable.” Pension cuts, savings in education and healthcare, and restrictions on continued wage payments during illness are supposedly “unavoidable.” The DGB does nothing against this. It only demands that the social devastation be carried out in closest cooperation with the union officials within the framework of Germany’s system of “codetermination,” the constitutionally enshrined corporatism that places union officials on company boards and committees.

At the same time, the DGB supports the conversion of industry to the production of armaments.

When the head of Germany’s largest arms manufacturer Rheinmetall, Armin Papperger, expressed interest last spring in taking over and converting Volkswagen plants for the production of military vehicles and equipment, IG Metall applauded. Papperger described the VW plant in Osnabrück in particular as “very suitable” for conversion to military production.

The Alstom plant in Görlitz, which traditionally built railway carriages, was sold to the arms company KNDS with IG Metall’s support. The well-known Cologne engine manufacturer Deutz also wants to enter the arms business. Engines for armoured vehicles promise higher profits than agricultural machinery.

The Meyer shipyard in Papenburg, which previously built giant cruise liners, will soon specialise in warships. Last summer, the federal government and the state of Lower Saxony—both then led by the SPD—helped the super-rich Meyer family dynasty out of crisis with €400 million in support and €2.8 billion in guarantees.

IG Metall has been a driving force in all these deals. As early as February 2024, it concluded a rearmament pact with the SPD and the arms industry.

In a joint ~~Socialist~~ paper entitled “Sovereign Resilience,” IG Metall, the SPD and the Federation of the German Security and Defence Industry (BDSV) called for a “comprehensive industrial policy concept for the defence industry,” aimed at “securing the performance of industry and enabling its potential for product development and production of relevant defence systems in the dimensions of land, air and sea.”

Union support for war policy, arms production and social cuts is not limited to Germany. In France, resistance to the austerity budget of the hated Macron government is developing into a general strike movement. The union leaders are trying to split this movement and are doing everything to sabotage resistance.

The role of the union leaderships is particularly blatant in the US. There, at the beginning of this week, at the same time as “Anti-War Day” here, the traditional Labor Day took place. On this “day of labour,” the unions did everything to prevent a powerful mobilisation against Trump’s dictatorship and police-state measures.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the US published an appeal that day, “No to dictatorship! Mobilise the working class against Trump’s coup!,” which is also of significance for workers here. It concludes with the words:

The working class possesses immense social power to shut down production, bring the entire economy to a halt and overthrow the ruling class. But this power can only be realized through independent organization and political clarity.

This Labor Day, every worker must confront the gravity of this crisis: The organizations that claim to represent your interests have betrayed you; the politicians who seek your votes have deceived you; and the capitalist system is ruthlessly destroying your life and your children’s lives.

The task now is to build independent organizations run by workers themselves—the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC)—to initiate an independent movement in the working class and prepare for the struggles that lie ahead.

The IWA-RFC is active in Europe and Germany as well. Use the form below to get in touch, and decide today to found a rank-and-file committee in your workplace or neighbourhood!



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