

Growing resistance to IG Metall union at Berlin Mercedes plant

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At the Mercedes plant in Berlin's Marienfelde district, a conflict is developing between workers and their union, IG Metall, expressed in a growing number of resignations from the union.

The WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party (SGP in Germany) support this growing resistance to the IG Metall apparatus and propose the establishment of an independent rank-and-file committee to discuss how to fight layoffs and social cuts and why a new organizational structure is necessary.

The plant in Marienfelde currently employs around 2,500 workers and produces parts for combustion engines. However, as production of conventional drives is gradually reduced, parts of the plant are being sold off. Instead, high-performance electric motors (axial flux motors) for AMG models are to be built (AMG is Mercedes' high-performance subsidiary). In addition, software solutions and the use of humanoid robots for global vehicle production are to be developed and tested in Marienfelde.

The works council has been negotiating the cutbacks for years, and its apparatus is now implementing them. Works council chairman Fevzi Sikar recently abandoned the "red line" mandating at least 2,000 jobs had to be secured.

As a result, employees are leaving the union in droves. They no longer want to financially support an organization that has brought them nothing but real wage losses for years and sells continuous job cuts as "securing the production site."

But this "protest with their feet" is not enough. The IG Metall apparatus continues to work closely with corporate management and supports these massive social attacks. Workers must take the fight for their rights and demands into their own hands. This requires new fighting organizations, organizations that prioritize workers' rights over profit interests and break through IG Metall's nationalist policies by networking across locations, companies, industries and national borders.

Gone are the days of the so-called "social partnership" in Germany, when unions were able to wrest a few concessions

for their members from the owners of capital within the framework and in the interests of the national economy. Across the world, a super-rich financial and economic oligarchy is trying to solve its crisis through war on all fronts: "shooting wars" to control resources, markets, and important trade routes; trade war against its rivals on the world market; and class war against its employees and the working population. This applies not only to the US, but also to Europe and especially to Germany.

IG Metall supports all of this. In the last one to two years, tens of thousands of jobs have been cut in the automotive and supplier industry. Countless plants have been closed, production facilities shut down and relocated. The names of IG Metall officials appear on every agreement securing the destruction of thousands and tens of thousands of jobs.

At Volkswagen last year, IG Metall and its works council went so far as to declare the elimination of 35,000 jobs and wage cuts of 20 percent a "Christmas miracle" for the workers. The conversion of car factories into tank factories has the full support of IG Metall!

The opposition to and desertion of IG Metall is calling onto the scene groups that describe themselves as "left-wing" and "militant." In November, the anonymous group "Auto Workers for a Militant IG Metall" distributed a flyer at the Mercedes plant in Marienfelde calling for "A strong, militant IG Metall!"

The flyer describes the corrupt machinations of IG Metall and its union officials and then explains: "Disgusted by this, many metalworkers are turning away from our union." For the authors, this is the main problem. Their goal is to stop the wave of resignations and keep as many colleagues as possible in IG Metall.

They write: "We have lost count of how many colleagues we have tried to convince not to leave IG Metall." So they see their task as recapturing workers who no longer want to be led around by the nose by IG Metall. Like the union bureaucrats themselves often do to let off steam, they talk about future struggles, but above all they try to preserve the union apparatus. Their leaflet ends with the words: "Rejoin

IG Metall to support our struggle!”

We definitively reject this! The claim that one must first submit to the dictates of the union bureaucracy in order to then fight against the leadership from within is false and serves only one purpose: to sabotage an effective struggle against the IG Metall leadership. Every union member knows that the Mafia-like structures of the IG Metall apparatus nip (crush!) any criticism in the bud. Opponents are intimidated and silenced through legal or illegal maneuvers.

It is not a question of reforming the IG Metall apparatus; it must be overcome. Only by breaking through the straitjacket of the union bureaucracy is it possible to wage a serious struggle to defend jobs and wages.

However, the group, which claims it wants IG Metall to fight, has no intention of conducting serious struggle. After all, what kind of “fight” are they proposing within the union? They declare: “Sign our petition to the IG Metall executive board!” And this plea to the executive board is supposed to bring about a strike against the jobs massacre.

The phrase “A rebellion on its knees” would be an understatement. After paragraphs lamenting the betrayal of the workforce’s interests by IG Metall and complaining that the “future contracts” signed by the union are not worth the paper they are written on, they demand a signature on a petition not binding in any way, containing only a few demands and requests to the IGM executive board. In doing so, this group exposes itself as an auxiliary force of the union bureaucracy. With leftist phrases against the “bosses” and timid criticism of IG Metall’s all-too-obvious betrayal, it covers up the union’s right-wing policies.

Instead of useless petitions that reduce workers to supplicants, the widespread militancy of workers needs a clear orientation.

That is why it is so important to build independent rank-and-file committees, which have already been formed in workplaces in several countries. They create a new organizational structure that makes it possible to unleash the great economic and political power of the working class and develop its self-confidence in its own strength. It is the many millions of workers in production and administration who create society’s wealth. The working class is the productive and value-creating force in society. Their rights take precedence over the profit interests of shareholders and speculators.

The central strategy of the rank-and-file committees must be internationalism. Everyone in the auto industry knows that, given the globalization of production, there is no longer a national economy and workers everywhere face the same problems. Nevertheless, the union bureaucrats spread the poison of nationalism with their demands for a national

industrial policy and securing production sites. They divide the working class and play workers in one country off against those in other countries or even other regions.

Whoever declares that turning away from IG Metall and fighting against its apparatus is strengthening the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party turns things upside down. It is precisely the union’s right-wing nationalist policies and suppression of any serious struggle to defend workers’ rights that strengthen the influence of the far right. The demands for the enforcement of German interests, the defense of Germany as a business location, punitive tariffs and trade war measures are identical in the IGM and AfD executive committees.

The WSWS/SGP counter this reactionary nationalism with the international unity of workers. By establishing rank-and-file committees, the WSWS/SGP are initiating worldwide cooperation and networking with workers at other Mercedes plants, the auto and supplier industry as a whole and the entire working class.

At the same time, the rank-and-file committees provide a platform for discussing how the immediate problems in the workplace are directly related to military rearmament and war. The rank-and-file committees will develop and discuss plans for linking and coordinating the struggle against mass layoffs with mobilization against war and armament.

This anti-capitalist and internationalist approach to the fight against job cuts and wage reductions is not only a blow to IG Metall, but also to the nationalist forces in and around the AfD and the “Zentrum Automobil” (“Automotive Center,” a right-wing outfit claiming to be an autoworkers’ union).

We invite all autoworkers, in Mercedes and Marienfelde and beyond, to contact us and discuss the necessary next steps. Send us a WhatsApp message at +491633378340 and fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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