

Reject the IG Metall union's nationalist defence of steel production in Germany!

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31 January 2026

When the IG Metall union calls for a protest outside the Annual General Meeting of Thyssenkrupp AG shareholders in Bochum on Friday, the focus is on the steel subsidiary. For while 11,000 of the 27,000 steelworkers are set to lose their jobs, and thus their financial livelihood in the coming years, the assembled shareholders want to approve a dividend of €93 million for themselves.

But the IG Metall protest is a desperate attempt to distract from its own treacherous role. The dividend that will be decided on Friday is part of the many millions stolen from the pockets of steelworkers through the so-called “social contract” at Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe (TKSE).

Steelworkers know exactly who drafted this sellout agreement and thus enforced the job cuts and the 8 percent pay cut at TKSE: the North Rhine-Westphalia IG Metall district manager Knut Giesler, as well as the union's works council reps at the steel subsidiary, under the chairmanship of Ali Güzel and in the overall group under Tekin Nasikkol.

Steelworkers must therefore take matters into their own hands and build independent rank-and-file Action Committees. IG Metall, its works council reps and their cronyism with the corporate leaders, which they describe as a “social partnership,” are tools of management and the shareholders against the workforce.

In the midst of the deepest crisis of the steel industry, Thyssenkrupp is imposing the largest jobs destruction programme in its history. More than one in three jobs is to be cut, and entire plants closed. In Bochum, the hot strip mill 3 and other facilities are being wound up, in Duisburg two of four blast furnaces are being shut down and there alone around 1,600 jobs in production as well as thousands in administration and indirect areas are being destroyed.

At the same time, the approximately 3,000 employees of Hüttenwerke Krupp Mannesmann (HKM) are threatened with either closure or a “continuation” with only a third of the workforce, while Salzgitter, Thyssenkrupp and Vallourec argue over “dowries,” legal disputes and ownership structures. At HKM, the IG Metall is also trying to conclude a “social contract” and thus regulate the breakup even before

a decision by the owners could trigger massive protests by the workforce.

At other corporations such as ArcelorMittal and Salzgitter, investments are also being cut, programmes tightened and further job cuts threatened—the entire industry is being ruthlessly trimmed for profit and global competition in the face of falling sales figures.

The employers' Steel Federation had already prepared the next attacks when it recently presented last year's sales figures. German steel production fell to its lowest level in 2025 since the financial crisis of 2008; plants are operating at less than 70 percent capacity.

Jindal Steel from India, to which Thyssenkrupp wants to sell its steel subsidiary, had therefore already indicated to IG Metall secretary Giesler in December that it would destroy further jobs. But he initially concealed this after his visit to India—together with Nasikkol.

Jindal, which is closely linked to the Hindu-nationalist BJP government of Narendra Modi, is pursuing an aggressive international expansion strategy and operates steel mills, mines and businesses on several continents. The IG Metall leadership initially expressly welcomed these plans because Jindal assured the continuation of “co-determination” (*Mitbestimmung*), the legally enshrined provision of various positions to union bureaucrats, i.e., the maintenance of corruption via lucrative posts on the supervisory board and works council.

Meanwhile, scepticism is growing among the union officials. Not because they reject the cutting of jobs and the lowering of wages; they are experts at working these out. Rather, they believe that in the event of a war, Germany must possess an effective steel industry. The submarines and warships built by the defence contractor Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems should be manufactured with “German steel,” they assert. The corporation is led by one of Giesler's predecessors at IG Metall in North Rhine Westphalia, Oliver Burkhard.

Mirze Edis, works council member at HKM for three decades and now simultaneously a Bundestag (parliament)

member for the Left Party, spoke very openly recently about the necessity for a German war industry. The country could “have no interest in Germany’s largest steel corporation being steered from New Delhi in the future,” he declared. “We are currently experiencing how a new world order is emerging. It would be fatal if we were to give up important value chains of industry right now or let ourselves be controlled remotely at this point. We need secure, green steel production in Germany.”

But this argument is doubly false. First, the conversion of industry to a war economy does not protect jobs. They are cut even faster to build an effective war machine. Second, it is no alternative to build the defence of jobs on war and thus on mass murder and death.

The federal and state governments, which have already promised Thyssenkrupp billions for the “transformation” of the company, are accordingly using the crisis to enforce an industrial policy aligned with war and Great Power geopolitics.

The restructuring to “green” steel production is not being pursued in the interest of protecting the climate or workers’ jobs, but as a lever to close plants, reduce the workforce and secure profits in an intensified trade and economic war. While billions in subsidies are flowing into direct reduction plants and electric furnaces in Duisburg and Salzgitter, investments elsewhere are being stopped, plants in Bremen and Eisenhüttenstadt are now called into question and the workforce subjected to permanent blackmail.

The federal government under Friedrich Merz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), who first declared war on the unemployed and now on employees, has adopted the union’s demands for cheaper electricity for industry, new subsidies and protective tariffs against steel from China—i.e., the ability to produce tanks, weapons and armaments in war.

Steelworkers are supposed to accept wage cuts, extended working hours, job cuts and “flexibility” in order to finance a rearmament policy that is pursued in the interest of German exports and the arms industry.

Build Action Committees!

Steelworkers can only defend their jobs, wages and social rights if they break with IG Metall and its works council reps and build their own independent fighting organisations. These Action Committees must be elected in all plants—Duisburg, Bochum, HKM, Kreuztal-Eichen, Salzgitter, Bremen, Eisenhüttenstadt, Georgsmarienhütte and all other locations—and be accountable solely to the rank and file.

Such committees must not allow any IG Metall officials or works council members holding responsible positions, as they have long since pledged their loyalty to management, the supervisory boards and the government.

The struggle of steelworkers in Duisburg, Bochum and Salzgitter is inseparably linked to the struggle of steelworkers in India, Italy, the Czech Republic, France, China and worldwide. Corporations like Thyssenkrupp, ArcelorMittal, Salzgitter and Jindal operate globally, play workers off against each other, demand “competitiveness” and the nationalist defence of steel production in Germany—and enforce wage cuts and job cuts everywhere.

The answer to this can only be an internationally coordinated class struggle that rejects such nationalist policies and establishes the unity of the working class across national borders.

When corporate bosses, supervisory boards and IG Metall officials declare that the “economic situation,” the “cost pressures” and worldwide competition mean there is “no alternative” to the closure of plants and the cutting of tens of thousands of jobs, this expresses the fact that the vital interests of the working class have become incompatible with the capitalist system.

The logical consequence is the demand for the expropriation of the large steel and arms corporations, their transfer into public ownership under the democratic control of the workers, and the planning of production according to social needs instead of profit. Instead of channelling billions in subsidies and arms contracts into the pockets of shareholders and managers, the existing resources must be used to reduce working hours, with no loss of pay, preserve all jobs and convert production ecologically and socially.

Every steelworker and every apprentice now faces a decision: either follow the well-known path of Opel, Ford or former steel locations—meaning piecemeal reductions, “social” severance payments, temporary employment companies, unemployment and poverty—or organise themselves independently and take a different course.

It is now necessary to convene assemblies in all factories, elect Action Committees, make contact with colleagues in other plants and countries and organise the fight for every job, every euro of wages and every social achievement. Send a WhatsApp message to +491633378340 and register immediately via the following form.



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