

How to carry out the rebellion against the IG Metall trade union in Germany

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2 February 2026

In the run-up to the works council elections in March, opposition to Germany's biggest union, the IG Metall, is growing in many big companies. Numerous opposition slates want to break the union's majority and organize a fight against job cuts and wage cuts. Although 160,000 industrial jobs have already been destroyed in the last 12 months, IG Metall has not organized a single industrial action. On the contrary, it is working closely with companies and the government to prepare the corporations for war and trade war at the expense of workers.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) welcomes the rapidly growing opposition to the union apparatus and supports workers who want to free themselves from its straitjacket. In recent weeks, we have received a number of letters from opposition works council lists asking for advice or support. The groups are very diverse, ranging from honest workers seeking a way to fight back to union bureaucrats who see their positions slipping away.

We want to respond publicly on the *World Socialist Web Site* to a request we received in December because it raises important questions about how the fight against workplace massacres must be developed. A worker from the Volkswagen main plant in Wolfsburg asked to what extent Dirk Kaiser's initiative is capable of breaking out of the IG Metall straitjacket and waging a genuine struggle. Some time ago, Kaiser founded the alternative "Union for Transformation" (GFT) and is running his own list in the works council elections.

The GFT criticizes IG Metall's austerity policy, thereby tapping into widespread opposition among the workforce to the job cuts and wage reductions that were pushed through at the end of 2024 as part of the so-called "Christmas miracle." In a statement from October 2025, the GFT explains that IG Metall had already entered the negotiations at that time with demands that were too low: "A 7 percent pay increase was not enough to offset the rise in the cost of living and inflation." Instead, IG Metall went on to agree to the destruction of 35,000 jobs.

The GFT is calling for a "real union" that "actively and critically represents the interests of the workforce" to replace IG Metall. Kaiser cites Claus Weselsky, the long-standing head of the German Train Drivers' Union (GdL), as a positive example, describing him as "one of the last authentic trade unionists in Germany." Weselsky also advises the GFT.

The GFT's program does not differ fundamentally from that of IG Metall. GFT leaders are quite prepared to cut jobs and wages, as long as there is a decent "quid pro quo" in return, which they do

not, however, quantify. They are not even demanding a halt to job cuts, but merely better negotiation and "future prospects."

Kaiser and his colleagues act as if all problems could be solved by correcting a few management mistakes and improving the negotiating skills of union representatives, but VW workers are confronted with much more fundamental issues. The cuts in Wolfsburg are part of a comprehensive attack on workers throughout Germany and worldwide. Everywhere, jobs are being cut en masse and wages and social benefits are being slashed in order to drive up profits.

Driven by the deep crisis of capitalism, individual countries and companies have entered into a fierce conflict over the imposition of the lowest wages and the worst conditions of exploitation. The US tariffs on European goods are only the beginning of an increasingly fierce trade war. By 2025, VW's sales in the US had already fallen by 13 percent and the trend is rising.

The burden of the trade war is being borne by workers on both sides of the Atlantic. Last year's job massacre served directly to prepare German corporations for the trade war. But we must not be under any illusions: if workers do not put an end to this, conditions of exploitation resembling those of the 19th century will return.

Not to mention the consequences of a hot war between the major powers, which would transform Europe.

Like IG Metall, the GFT accepts the conditions of the capitalist crisis and the trade war and will therefore become the administrator of the cuts in the same way. The alternative union even explicitly champions plant by plant nationalism. It declares that the competitiveness of German companies must be improved through cheap energy prices and an end to the "SPD-Green ideology" and calls for the expansion of German locations at the expense of Mexican ones.

This Sankt-Florian policy (spare my house, set fire to others) will not save a single job or protect wages, but rather further fuel the downward spiral of layoffs and wage cuts. Companies can play plants off against each other and intensify conditions of exploitation, while the major powers continue to prepare for war.

The experience with Weselsky's GdL in particular shows that a little more union militancy cannot solve this fundamental problem. After thousands of train drivers switched from the former Transnet (now EVG) to the GdL in 2007 in order to throw off the straitjacket of the official German Trade Union Federation (DGB), Weselsky, under pressure from the new members, organized a powerful train drivers' strike that actually improved the working

conditions of those affected. Many workers responded enthusiastically to this largest strike since German reunification and saw Weselsky and his GDL as an alternative to the DGB mafia.

But subsequently, the GDL, like the EVG, worked as a bargaining partner of the railway company to roll back the improvements for train drivers, push ahead with the labour exploitation and reduce real wages. Train drivers are much worse off today than they were before the big strike of 2008. Instead of using the enthusiasm among large sections of the working class for a broad offensive, Weselsky turned against the rest of the railway workers and hoped to shift the cuts somewhat in favour of train drivers. The result was disastrous working conditions for everyone.

The example of the GDL shows that the inability of the unions to represent the interests of workers cannot simply be attributed to the depravity of individual officials or mafia-like structures, even though both are beyond question. The unions side with the companies and support the government's war policy because they are closely linked to the nation-state, which forms the framework for all their activities.

As conflicts between the major powers intensify, they move closer to their own government and serve as its police force to suppress the workers. This was the case in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I, when the unions concluded a so-called truce with the Kaiser, and also in May 1933, when union officials marched under swastika flags and offered Hitler their cooperation, only to be banned the very next day.

Today, conflicts between the major powers are escalating once again. Trump began the year with a criminal attack on Venezuela and is threatening new attacks on Iran. Even a direct military conflict between Europe and America can no longer be ruled out, as Trump's threats against Greenland show.

The ruling class in Germany is responding by developing its own great power ambitions and seeking to enforce its economic interests around the world by military means. The stated goal is to put Germany in a position to win a war against nuclear power Russia within three years. Workers are expected to pay for this madness through cuts in healthcare, education, social services, job losses in industry and ultimately with their lives.

Those who accept this framework can only lose!

But that does not mean that workers can no longer defend their rights, as the unions would have us believe. Struggles have been won in the past and they can be won again today. But that requires three fundamental principles:

The struggle must be waged independently of the union bureaucracies, which are closely linked to the state and government and act as police forces against the workers.

The struggle must be waged internationally. Today, it is the most normal thing in the world to exchange information and coordinate across borders. Each of us does this constantly at work and in our private lives. The only reason this does not happen in our struggles is because of the blockade by the union apparatus. The VW Group has almost 700,000 employees worldwide, including almost 300,000 in Germany. If they fight together and do not allow themselves to be played off against each other, these attacks can be

repelled and conditions for all workers improved. Such a struggle must be the starting point for a broad offensive by the working class against the war policy and the attacks on workers.

The struggle must not be guided by corporate profit motives and the interests of individual nation-states but must focus on the needs of workers. Enormous technological developments, above all artificial intelligence, make it possible to improve the lives of all people to an unprecedented level. But under capitalist conditions, the same technology leads to mass layoffs, war and destruction. This cannot be accepted.

In order to organize the struggle on the basis of these principles, action committees independent of the union bureaucrats must be established in every factory and every department, which must network internationally and organize counterpower to the government and management.

This is not wishful thinking but follows directly from the objective situation. The trade war puts fierce class struggles on the agenda. In the US, Trump is seeking to violently suppress workers' resistance to his war and austerity policies. His ICE Gestapo is terrorizing entire cities. But after the murders of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, a huge wave of protest has erupted. In Minneapolis, hundreds of thousands took part in a general strike, and a nationwide general strike is being discussed everywhere.

American workers who are fighting back against cuts and dictatorship are our natural allies. We must tear down the artificial barriers that prevent us from organizing this solidarity and developing a strong movement of the international working class.

The government has coined the term "turning point," meaning the preparations for war, social attacks and dictatorship. The formation of action committees heralds a turning point in the struggle of the working class. Just as the ruling class is reviving its reactionary tradition of imperialism, war and fascism, the working class must revive its revolutionary, socialist and internationalist traditions. Workers in auto and all other industries must approach and prepare every action to defend their jobs, wages and social standards from this standpoint.

We call for this perspective to be discussed in workplaces and reports given on the developing opposition to IG Metall and other unions. Contact us if you want to know more about building action committees and need support to become active yourself. Fill out the form or send a message via WhatsApp to +491633378340.



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