

# IG Metall boss calls for protectionism and trade war

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At the union's annual press conference on January 26 and in further statements IG Metall chair Christiane Benner has called for protectionism and trade war as integral elements of the union's so-called "Initiative for Jobs and Economic Recovery: Future Instead of Relocation." Benner warned, "The situation in Germany is extremely serious; we need new strategies."

Amid the most severe attacks on workers since World War II, Benner and IG Metall stand squarely with big business and the federal government. IG Metall's new strategy amounts to "Germany above all others," a program steeped in German economic nationalism. We are currently seeing where this leads in the US. As the representative of the US economic and financial oligarchy, US President Donald Trump is attempting to rescue American capitalism through war against the working class at home and military operations against his rivals abroad.

There, too, the Trump administration can be sure of the support of the union apparatus. The sister union of the IGM in the US, the United Auto Workers (UAW), immediately after Trump's second takeover, openly declared through its president Shawn Fain that the union was prepared to cooperate with his administration—especially on issues of economic nationalism and tariffs.

Currently, the UAW is doing everything it can to sabotage a general strike in Minneapolis and nationwide against Trump's ICE murderers and his dictatorial aspirations.

This is insane: on both sides of the Atlantic, the union apparatuses are standing firmly behind their respective governments and corporations, advocating trade war and ultimately world war.

For example, IG Metall declares that the German government's decision to reduce the industrial electricity price retroactively from January 1 as an important instrument against the crisis and then complains that the measure does not go far enough because it only provides for single-digit savings for companies!

The IGM initiative, intended to "get the ball rolling," comprises three main points:

- German industry must become even more productive and profitable in order to secure first place in the intensifying international trade war.
- European and, above all, German business locations should

be defended against China and the US through protectionist and military measures. IG Metall calls for the economy to focus on "stable and promising future fields" which it considers particularly profitable, especially the war industry—"aerospace, defense, and security."

- The "new strategy" entails an enormous acceleration of labor productivity, i.e., the exploitation of the workforce in every company. Fully aware that this will provoke resistance, IG Metall calls for expanded intervention by its official apparatus at the "local and regional level."

The extent to which IG Metall has adopted the new "language of power politics" of the federal government and the German ruling class is also evident in Benner's statements in last week's interview with *Der Spiegel* magazine:

We are already in the midst of a trade war. US tariffs are already being imposed on a range of products, including 50 percent on steel parts. That is huge. The task now is to strengthen Europe's independence. We must open up new markets. That is why the Mercosur trade agreement with South America is so important. We should also urgently explore Indian and African markets.

Arguing that it is "important to stand up for principles and values," the IGM boss openly advocates expansive German economic and trade war measures, especially against the US and China. Since the old rules-based order no longer functions, she says, we must start looking at certain issues differently and seek new solutions.

When asked by *Der Spiegel* whether "the time for restraint is over," Benner replied: "I'm afraid a man like that [Trump] only understands a strong common language." What she means by this is clear: high counter-tariffs and trade war measures that invariably lead to military confrontation.

Specifically, Benner demands: "Anyone who wants to sell here must also produce here." China's largest car manufacturer, BYD, builds cars in Hungary with components

from China – “Something is going wrong here.” She is outraged that German state-owned companies have purchased electric buses from BYD, among others. In addition, the government’s 500 billion special fund for infrastructure must go exclusively to domestic manufacturers.

The IG Metall initiative paper begins with the following statement: “Between US tariffs and subsidised imports from China, our industrial location is in danger of being crushed.” This means that “not only is our export model at stake, but prosperity, employment, and democratic stability are also in danger.” The country’s system of “social partnership is increasingly being called into question,” complains IG Metall.

By “social partnership,” Benner and her IG Metall apparatus mean the division of labor in enforcing attacks on the workforce in the interests of corporations. Point 5 of the “initiative” states unequivocally: “The pressure to act is high. We at IG Metall offer immediate cooperation at company level on the following three issues.”

First, the use of AI must be expanded “for greater productivity and new business models.” IG Metall is therefore pushing for the rapid implementation of the “High-Tech Agenda Germany” adopted by the German cabinet in the summer of 2025. Productivity—i.e., profit maximization—should be increased by means of AI-controlled production processes.

Secondly, decision-making processes must be accelerated, which requires “relief from politicians.”

And thirdly, the union is rushing to the aid of Chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU) and business representatives. Merz recently complained about the “lifestyles” of workers who work part time or call in sick. The IGM response is a concept designed to drive employees to work.

“As part of a ‘health policy offensive,’ we will address working conditions, corporate cultures, and strategic deficits in companies and develop targeted measures,” the IGM paper cynically states. In plain language: The IGM apparatchiks on the ground can reduce sick leave rates much more effectively than the counterproductive official campaign of “suspecting those who are sick.”

The union repeatedly assures employers and the government it will continue to suppress resistance in the workplace: “As IG Metall, we take responsibility in companies and society,” it says in its initiative. “We contribute to stabilization with our collective bargaining policy, our company alliances, and our political commitment.”

Benner emphasized this last Monday: “IG Metall, its works councils, and the employees have delivered. The employees in our sectors are foregoing billions. Without us, the situation in German industry would already be bleak,” she claimed.

This is an obvious distortion of the facts. The employees are not voluntarily “foregoing” these billions; they are being forced to do so by their own union. The truth is that IG Metall and its works councils have handed the corporations and companies jobs and wages on a silver platter. Each of the many job

massacres in 2025 bears the signature of the works councils and union officials. This is what saves the corporations billions.

At VW, they have pushed through salary cuts of up to 20 percent and the elimination of 35,000 jobs—more than one in four; at Thyssenkrupp Stahl, they have pushed through the elimination of 11,000 jobs—out of a total of less than 27,000. The same applies to Porsche, Mercedes, ZF, Bosch, and many companies in the metal and electrical industry. Last year, an estimated 60,000 jobs were lost nationwide, particularly in the Ruhr region (mainly in the steel and metal industry) and in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria (mainly in the auto industry). Since the downsizing plans drawn up by the IGM last year will allow corporations to cut thousands more jobs in the coming years, there is no end in sight.

To end this downward spiral, the workforce needs its own new strategy. This must follow three basic principles:

- The struggle must be waged independently of IG Metall and all other union apparatuses, which work closely with the state, the government, and corporations and act as company police toward the workers.

- The struggle must be waged internationally, overcoming the divisions created by IG Metall, the UAW, and others. The VW corporation alone has nearly 700,000 employees worldwide, including nearly 300,000 in Germany. Including suppliers and service providers, millions are linked in a single process. Only by fighting together and refusing to be played off against each other can the attacks 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 drive and the attacks on workers.

- The struggle must not be guided by the profit logic of corporations and the interests of individual nation states, as the unions propagate. The needs of workers must be at the center. Enormous technological developments, above all artificial intelligence, make it possible to improve the lives of everyone 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 a counterweight to the government and management.



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