

Berlin: Factories in ailing industrial sectors bought up to produce military weapons

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In the German metal and electrical industries, 10,000 to 15,000 jobs are being destroyed every month. However, in one branch of industry—armaments—a gold rush atmosphere prevails. Arms companies like Rheinmetall are hiring personnel, buying up plants in ailing sectors and transforming them into weapons and ammunition factories.

For example, employees of a Continental brake plant in Gifhorn are to move to a new Rheinmetall ammunition factory in the Lüneburg Heath, while tank builder KNDS is taking over a railway plant in Görlitz, which will in future produce Leopard 2 main battle tanks instead of trams and double-decker railway cars. In Berlin, this development is gripping the technology and start-up sector: dozens of companies, originally active in the civilian applications of AI, robotics, optics or medical technology, are reorienting themselves towards “dual use” and military contracts.

The most radical expression of this conversion policy is the transformation of Pierburg GmbH, a traditional automotive supplier in Berlin-Wedding, into Rheinmetall Waffe Munition GmbH. At the Scheringstrasse 2 site, right next to residential buildings, a park, a playground and an open-air swimming pool, production of components for the automotive industry has been gradually phased out since mid-2025 and replaced by the mechanical processing of shell casings for artillery ammunition. The transition is to be completed by mid-2026.

Rheinmetall itself frames the new task as follows: The Berlin plant is “in future to predominantly manufacture mechanical components for military needs,” specifically metal casings for artillery ammunition, which will be filled with explosives in Lower Saxony. This is the first ammunition production facility in the densely populated working class district of Wedding since the end of the Second World War—a break with a decades-old taboo that war production should not take place in the middle of a residential area.

The company, the works council and IG Metall union are selling the conversion as a socio-political blessing: around 350 jobs would be “saved” by moving them entirely over to arms production. Rheinmetall promises brand-new machines, investments in infrastructure, qualification programs and planning security for the “next decade.” At the same time, the corporation is divesting itself of its automotive division and intends to sell off 7,800 jobs in this sector worldwide—an expression of the profound change of course towards the arms business and war profits.

The conversion of Pierburg in Berlin-Wedding into an

ammunition factory is thus not an isolated case, but part of a rearmaments offensive that is taking place at the expense of the working class and the civilian population.

In the bitter struggle for markets, raw materials and spheres of influence, all the great powers are massively upgrading their armed forces and forging new military alliances. The “new era” in Germany’s foreign and defence policies, the militarization of the EU and Trump’s course towards trade war, war and dictatorship are reactions to one and the same crisis of the world capitalist system.

The gigantic arms budgets are being financed by systematic cuts in education, health, social infrastructure and pensions and a lowering of the living standards of the working class. While millions of workers worldwide are losing their jobs, the bourgeoisie offers some of them the cynical exchange of producing weapons of mass destruction in return for “security” and the preservation of their jobs. The shift of production from civilian to military goods is the economic form in which the trade war and the preparation of new military wars penetrate the everyday life of the factories.

IG Metall supports the war economy

IG Metall plays a decisive role in this transition. Instead of organizing workers’ resistance, the union presents the conversion of the plant on Scheringstrasse as a “transformation process without alternative” and a “positive sign directed towards the future.”

Works Council Chairman Bernd Benninghaus declares that the conversion to armaments secures all production jobs, brings new machines and qualifications and ends the phase of constant restructuring. He labels workers who are critical of the transformation as “isolated cases.”

In an interview with IG Metall Berlin, Benninghaus and his deputy Martin Hoffmann emphasized that the conversion is taking place fully following the “co-determination” model, granting union bureaucrats a seat on corporate committees, and that the new company will join the employers’ association in Berlin-Brandenburg, meaning it will remain bound by collective agreements struck with the union. Their message is: the workforce

is “writing a success story”; the alternative would have been the closure of the site and negotiations for a social plan to deal with it. Thus, the works council accepts the corporation’s blackmail—unemployment or war production—and helps shape it as co-managers.

IG Metall is doing the same at a higher level as well. The Berlin district manager explains that it is “undeniable” that “we—unfortunately—need this production in these times.” The First Representative of IG Metall Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony, Jan Otto, emphasizes that while one wants “peace,” in the “worst-case scenario” one must be able to defend oneself, and then it is better to produce the “stuff” here. The IG Metall national executive justifies this course by pointing to “constitutional national and alliance defence” and speaks euphemistically of “equipping, not rearming.”

For the workers at Rheinmetall and other companies, this has fatal consequences: their justified concerns about their jobs are used to draw them into the logic of militarism and subordinate them to the interests of the arms industry.

The Left Party plays its usual double game

While IG Metall and the works council stand behind the rearmament policy without any ifs, ands or buts, the Berlin Left Party expresses moral concerns. Under the motto “No Rheinmetall weapons production in Wedding! Social needs instead of rearmament!” it calls for demonstrations outside the plant on Scheringstrasse and denounces wars, poverty and the profits of the arms corporations.

It demands that public funds be invested in education, health and climate-friendly transport instead of weapons production, and points to the historical role of the site in the world wars and forced labour under the Nazis.

The Left Party is playing its usual double game. Locally, it puts itself at the head of the resistance in order to prevent it radicalizing and turning against the union and against its friends in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, with whom it seeks to form a joint state government after the Berlin state election in September. It fuels the illusion that the government and corporations can be moved to a “more reasonable” policy by moral appeals and that capitalism can be pacified through pressure “from below.”

Yet wherever the Left Party itself has a say, it supports rearmament and social cuts. In the Bundesrat (upper house of the federal parliament), it voted to exempt arms spending from the debt brake, which makes the massive expansion of arms production—and thus the conversion of Pierburg into an arms factory—possible in the first place. And in the Berlin Senate (state executive), it co-organized the cutting of public sector jobs, the slashing of social spending and the sale of public housing to real estate sharks for years.

The reason for this double game by the Left Party is its unconditional defence of capitalism. Despite its name, it is not a

left-wing or socialist party, but represents the interests of the better-off middle-class layers who are afraid of social upheavals, hence its criticism of social grievances. But it fears a movement of the working class that questions capitalist property far more than all the conspiracies of the ruling class. Therefore, in crises, it unreservedly takes their side.

The Left Party’s ideological brethren in Greece—and recently also in the US—have vividly demonstrated this. In Greece, Alexis Tsipras was elected head of government in 2015 because he spoke out against the European Union’s austerity dictates. As prime minister, he then implemented an even harsher austerity program—with devastating consequences for Greek workers, pensioners and their families.

In the US, Zohran Mamdani won the election for mayor of New York at the end of last year because he presented himself as a socialist and opponent of President Trump. But even before he took office, he reconciled with Trump in the White House and dropped his most important election promises—higher taxes for the rich, affordable rents—like a hot potato.

Building action committees

Rearmament and the conversion of civilian factories into arms production cannot be prevented by moral appeals to the corporations and the government, but only by the independent struggle of the working class. This requires a break with the unions, which are in cahoots with the corporations, and with organizations like the Left Party, which do everything in their power to strangle the movement and steer it into a dead end.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) advocates the building of rank-and-file action committees that are independent of the trade unions, led by trustworthy, democratically elected workers, and that organize the fight against layoffs and the conversion to arms production.

They must proceed from the principle that the interests of the working class stand above the profit interests of the corporations and their shareholders. They must network across plants and unite internationally, and it is for this purpose, that the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) was founded.

We invite all autoworkers from Pierburg/Rheinmetall and others to contact us and discuss the necessary next steps. Send a WhatsApp to +491633378340 and fill out the form below.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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