

Build independent action committees!

Tesla Grünheide, Berlin: IG Metall union suffers defeat in works council elections

Ludwig Weller
13 March 2026

In the works council elections that took place between 2 and 4 March at Europe's only Tesla Gigafactory in Grünheide near Berlin, the IG Metall union suffered a crushing defeat.

Despite massive efforts on the part of the IG Metall, and with major media attention, only 31 percent of the workforce voted for the "IG Metall Tesla Workers GFFB" slate. The union will take only 13 of the total of 37 seats in the new works council. The remaining 24 seats fall to non-unionised lists. The most seats, 16, were won by the Tesla-steered "Giga United" list, led by the current works council chairwoman Michaela Schmitz. The "Polish Initiative" list, which ran for the first time, received 3 seats.

The IG Metall had firmly expected to receive over 50 percent of the votes and thus be able to take over the chairmanship of the works council. After the 2024 works council election, the IG Metall still formed the largest group but did not have a majority of the seats.

In the run-up to the works council elections, leading business-friendly media such as finance daily *Handelsblatt* and leading news weekly *Der Spiegel* wrote spoke of a "struggle over direction." *Der Spiegel* even spoke of a "culture war in which the libertarian Silicon Valley spirit clashes with the decades-old co-determination tradition of German industry."

These publications jumped to the aid of the IG Metall because they take the view that uncontrolled class conflicts in large corporations can be prevented only through the well-established integration of the trade unions. But the days of "social partnership" and social compromise belong to history. Across the entire auto industry, top corporate management has declared war on the workers. Instead of social partnership, class struggle is now the order of the day.

But the IG Metall and its works council reps cannot and will not wage this struggle because their existence is based on class collaboration. The crisis, in which there is nothing left to distribute, drives them to swear allegiance to the corporate bosses and the state. If opposition and resistance arise within the workforce, which must necessarily be directed against the treacherous union bureaucracy, the IG Metall apparatus suppresses this rebellion with mafia methods, as at Bosch in Schwäbisch Gmünd.

In the election campaign at Tesla, the IG Metall list itself came under fire. The IG Metall district manager for Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony, Jan Otto, spoke of "attacks by management and an exceptionally unfair election campaign."

Tesla management, led by plant manager André Thierig, railed against the IG Metall and even indirectly threatened to halt further plant expansion. Management's influence was far-reaching: threats were made at works meetings, in one-on-one conversations with superiors, and in continuous propaganda over the plant radio in the toilets.

Elon Musk, the richest man in the world, who supports Trump and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), and who engages in union-busting in his US factories and constantly violates labour law, personally interfered in the Tesla works council election in Grünheide and threatened to freeze investments if the election did not turn out in his favour.

The scandal at a works council meeting, where Tesla accused an IG Metall secretary of making a secret recording, was a transparent provocation. Tellingly, the two sides reached a settlement before the case reached the labour court.

These undemocratic attacks on the part of Tesla management must be rejected on principle. It concerns the right of the workers to elect the representatives of their choice without threats and blackmail from management.

Had there been an independent rank-and-file action committee in the plant, it would have protested against the undemocratic interference in the election and against the witch-hunt of colleagues on sick leave and demanded the convening of an extraordinary works meeting. It would have insisted that management, and, in particular, plant manager André Thierig, keep out of the election and commit in writing to stopping its unlawful behavior.

The IG Metall and its otherwise vociferous district manager Jan Otto undertook nothing of the sort. They did not defend workers' democratic rights. They did not even try to mobilise the workforce against these blatant attacks. Jan Otto even ruled out challenging the election. A legal solution was not a priority for him. "We have to clarify this morally," he announced.

The dead end of the "co-determination tradition"

To be blunt: had the IG Metall won a majority on the works council at Tesla, it would not be a victory for the workforce. Assuming Musk would agree to a "social partnership," the IG Metall would eat out of his hand, establish its hated mafia methods at Tesla, and suppress any independent resistance.

The IG Metall apparatus acts as an extended arm of the corporations throughout the entire auto industry. Tesla workers have noticed this too. They have followed the endless mass dismissals and wage cuts agreed to and enforced by IG Metall works council reps. Precisely in large auto corporations—such as VW, Mercedes and Bosch—where powerful and well-paid IG Metall bureaucrats call the shots, an ongoing jobs massacre is currently taking place, without any resistance whatsoever from the IG Metall.

If the IG Metall were indeed a representative of workers' interests, it would have had plenty of opportunity at Tesla over the last four years to mobilise the workforce, composed of workers of many nationalities, against Musk. It would also have reached out to workers at the other Gigafactories in the US and China and advocated a global unification of autoworkers with the aim of breaking the power of the corporation.

But instead, the IG Metall categorically rejects such a perspective. It strives to secure its privileged existence with majorities in works councils and well-rewarded supervisory board posts. It sees its traditional task as ensuring peace and order in the factories, acting as company police.

The fact that the majority of the workforce voted for the company-steered "Giga United" list, and nine other more or less Tesla-friendly lists, testifies to disorientation and a lack of perspective—a result of the fact that an independent and powerful representation of the workforce's interests has not yet been built.

Among the 107 candidates on the IG Metall list, the majority of whom are workers with a migrant background, there are quite a few who stood for sincere reasons—out of a lack of alternatives or ignorance of the long history of betrayal and sell-outs by the IG Metall.

Musk's exploitation can only be effectively fought through independent self-organisation in rank-and-file action committees, combined with a socialist perspective. That is the task of the hour.

When union district manager Jan Otto now talks big at a press conference and suddenly discovers that Musk is a "capitalist" who is "hollowing out a piece of democracy by dint of money," he makes himself look ridiculous. With this fake scolding of capitalism, he is in reality only complaining that Musk does not want to become part of the—as he says—"practised co-determination tradition" in which trade union bureaucrats like him sit on the supervisory board as reliable co-managers.

It is barely four years since the huge Tesla Gigafactory in Grünheide was ceremoniously opened by Elon Musk. The then-chancellor, Olaf Scholz (SPD), and economics minister, Robert Habeck (Greens), showered Musk with praise and honour. The IG Metall announced that it had "every interest in seeing this plant flourish and have lasting success."

During these four years, the conditions of exploitation have become ever more extreme, as documented in the media. A former shift supervisor, for example, told *Stern* magazine: "People are being burned up at Tesla. At times, one in two members of my team was off sick." But there were no significant protests from the IG Metall, let alone strike action.

The IG Metall's main demand is for a collective agreement, which could exist only with an IG Metall majority on the works council, and which would then apply only to union members. On a flyer with which it is trying to recruit members, the IG Metall compares the collective agreements that once applied at Mercedes in Berlin-Marienfelde many years ago with the conditions at Tesla.

Wages at Tesla are apparently somewhat lower, but this conceals the fact that the IG Metall has also agreed to cuts in real wages and further reductions in the wage structure at Mercedes in recent years.

Even more serious is the decimation of jobs for which the IG Metall works council at Mercedes in Marienfelde is jointly responsible. Under the slogan "Transformation instead of closure," the IG Metall agreed to a staff reduction from 3,000 to 1,800 employees.

Job cuts at Tesla

The IG Metall has also accepted job cuts at Tesla from 12,400 to 10,700 over the last two years without a fight. Tesla has been struggling with sales problems since 2024. In 2025, the Grünheide plant, the only one in

Europe, was operating at less than 60 percent capacity. Nevertheless, profits slumped only slightly, because productivity was increased through further automation and the cutting of 1,700 jobs. Over 1,000 temporary workers had to leave in the last two years.

Musk announced a 10 percent jobs cut in 2024; in Grünheide it was 14 percent. In 2025, Tesla sold 9 percent fewer cars worldwide; on the Chinese market and in Europe, sales figures literally collapsed, in some cases by 40 to 50 percent. This was not least a result of Musk's fascist tirades and his support for Trump and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The IG Metall is, of course, aware of all this. It specifically employs a team of several people for Tesla in its Berlin office. Yet even during the works council election campaign, it did not comment on the connection between Musk's methods of exploitation and current political events in the US.

It did not say a word about the fascist witch-hunt against migrants and the murder of US citizens by the ICE immigration Gestapo, the assault on Venezuela, the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the criminal war against Iran. Yet Musk is one of the driving forces behind Trump's plans for war and dictatorship. As head of the DOGE rationalisation authority, he was responsible for mass dismissals in the public sector.

It is not only at Tesla, where these questions virtually impose themselves, that the IG Metall remains silent. Throughout the entire auto and metal industry, its officials suppress the highly explosive political questions about the links between war, rearmament, mass dismissals and social devastation.

The reason for this is simple: the IG Metall and all other trade unions stand politically on the side of the government and Chancellor Merz, support their war policy and defend the corporations' national profit interests, in which they are embedded. This is where the circle of the "co-determination tradition" closes.

A workforce that is as internationally diverse as that of Tesla underscores the international character of the working class and the necessity of joint action. Employees from 150 nations work in the Grünheide plant. Over 2,000 people commute across the border every day from nearby Poland. There are hundreds of workers of Turkish and Arab origin. Not a few have fled from war and crisis zones.

The national phalanx of government, corporations and trade unions requires an international response from the working class. Struggles must not get bogged down at the national level. In the global auto industry, supply chains and production are intertwined across borders. There is no such thing as a "German" or "American" car. Musk's exploitation can be effectively fought only through independent self-organisation in action committees, combined with a socialist perspective.

We call on the Tesla workers in Grünheide: Participate in building an independent action committee to unite globally with your colleagues. Get in touch with us. Write a Whatsapp to +49 163 3378340.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)