

IG Metall union suffers losses in works council elections

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The IG Metall union has suffered losses in many car plants in works council elections that began at the start of March. Even though it still commands a majority in the large plants, the dominance of the trade union apparatus has been shaken.

Results at Volkswagen, the largest German car corporation, show the incipient rebellion of the workforce particularly clearly. In all German plants in 2022, IG Metall still held 93 percent of all works council seats, according to its own evaluation. In 2026, the figure is only 85 percent, 304 out of a total of 359 works council posts.

It is remarkable that IG Metall lost even more votes at VW headquarters in Wolfsburg. Here, the chair of the general works council, Daniela Cavallo, led the IG Metall list. Only 58 percent of the roughly 60,000 employees took part in the election—a historically low figure. IG Metall received 26,000 votes, 74 percent of the valid votes and less than half of those eligible to vote. Compared to the last election in 2022, this is a loss of more than 10 percentage points.

A “high-ranking IG Metall insider” had told business weekly *WirtschaftsWoche* before the election that if the other lists in Wolfsburg received up to 30 percent, it would be a “huge earthquake.” For Cavallo, such a plunge would be “a clear vote of no confidence.” Now more than 25 percent have voted for other lists.

The main beneficiary of the IG Metall losses in Wolfsburg is the “Other List” (*Andere Liste*) led by Frank Patta. It received almost 5,000 votes and was able to expand its representation from four to 10 seats. The Christian Democratic CGM won three seats, while the “Trade Union for Transformation” (GFT) and “The Alternative” received one each.

In other plants, right-wing extremist lists were also partly able to exploit the opposition to IG Metall. In Zwickau, the “Alliance of Free Works Council Reps” list, where far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) members also stand, was able to hold its previous four seats with 11.5 percent of the vote. In Braunschweig, IG Metall lost five seats, two of them to the “Zentrum” association, which is considered an arm of the AfD and stood for the first time in Braunschweig.

This development is not restricted to VW. At the Mercedes-Benz main plant in Stuttgart-Untertürkheim, where the AfD-aligned “Zentrum” was founded, it took almost 21 percent of the votes and nine of the 43 seats. IG Metall lost five seats compared to 2022. Nevertheless, the right-wingers in the plants achieved nowhere

near the AfD’s results in political elections, as the “Zentrum” had hoped for, especially in Stuttgart.

In the Leipzig plants of BMW and Porsche, other lists were able to achieve successes. In the Porsche plant, they won 10 out of 31 seats. At BMW, 16 out of 35 went to the opposition; here the IG Metall lost nine seats. The IG Metall previously suffered a defeat at Tesla.

The reason for IG Metall’s loss of votes is obvious: its officials and works council members do not represent the interests of the workforce, but of the corporations. They have supported every attack on jobs and working conditions in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

This is particularly evident at VW. Almost one in three jobs—a total of 35,000—will fall victim to the collective agreement pushed through by Cavallo and IG Metall secretary Thorsten Gröger in December 2024, while wages and salaries are set to fall by up to 20 percent. Cavallo and Gröger also support the conversion of plants to war production.

Shortly before the polling stations closed, VW boss Oliver Blume announced the destruction of 50,000 jobs across the entire group in collaboration with IG Metall and its works council reps. At the beginning of the week, a study drawn up by McKinsey on behalf of VW was then leaked to the press recommending that of the group’s 10 plants in Germany, only two should remain: VW in Wolfsburg and Audi in Ingolstadt.

The leaked McKinsey proposal serves “as a beacon for the workforce,” writes stock market magazine *Der Aktionär*.

In this situation, workers’ rejection of IG Metall works councils and officials is growing. Their cronyism with managers and shareholders is hated. But this opposition was only partially expressed in the works council elections.

Why? Because most workers do not feel represented by the opposition lists that stood and mistrust the entire system of legally regulated “co-determination” supposed to provide “worker representation” on various company committees. And in most cases, this is absolutely justified. Opposition lists frequently emerge from internal struggles within the apparatus. This is currently all the more often the case, as the number of full-time works council posts is falling along with the reduction in the workforce.

At VW in Wolfsburg, Frank Patta founded the “Other List” before the 2022 works council election. Patta comes from the same stable as Cavallo and her predecessor, Bernd Osterloh. Before he

fell out with the latter, Patta was one of the most important IG Metall officials at VW. He had been installed by Osterloh as general secretary of the global group works council and had, in the meantime, held the office of First Representative and Managing Director of the Wolfsburg IG Metall. According to a rumour among VW employees, his break with Osterloh and IG Metall arose over a dispute regarding expense claims for works council trips to Brazil.

The opposition he espouses is not in the interest of the workforce. For example, he criticises the relocation of Golf production from Wolfsburg to Mexico and the phasing out of combustion engines. This divisive nationalist policy stems from the arsenal of the trade union apparatus and will neither save a single job nor protect wages. Rather, the corporations play off one location against another and constantly sharpen the conditions of exploitation.

Where workers actually turned against the IG Metall apparatus, the latter struck back with utmost severity. At Bosch in Schwäbisch Gmünd, for example, the slate put forward by the “Free Metalworkers” (*Freie Metaller*), which, supported by production workers, led a rebellion against the local IG Metall apparatus, was not even allowed to participate in the election.

The IG Metall apparatus, however, would not have been able to defend its dominance in the plants once again, despite all reprisals, if it were not slavishly supported by various pseudo-left groups.

These criticise individual aspects of IG Metall policy but sharply reject all attempts to seriously oppose the apparatus. For them, the apparatus *is* the trade union and the trade union the supposed representative of workers—even if in reality it has long been the opposite.

The Left Party, its pseudo-left supporters and the Stalinist MLPD seek to cushion the growing opposition and secure the control of the apparatus. The MLPD, for example, raged fiercely against the “Free Metalworkers” slate and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), which defended the slate against the attacks of the IG Metall apparatus.

This year’s works council elections demonstrate the urgency of a new political perspective in order to fight against the IG Metall apparatus and the co-managers sitting in the works councils, a perspective that points beyond the framework of the company and capitalism.

The decimation being carried out in the car industry is part of a comprehensive attack on workers all over the world. Mass job reductions, wage decreases and cuts to social benefits are taking place everywhere in order to drive up profits and pass the consequences of the capitalist crisis onto the workers.

Under President Donald Trump, the USA has declared war on the world in order to defend its dwindling economic hegemony by military means. It has attacked Iran and threatens to destroy the country of 90 million inhabitants. The German government under Friedrich Merz is placing the Ramstein air base at its disposal for this and is preparing to participate in the war itself in order to guarantee the “freedom of navigation.”

The escalation of the war drives up prices and will result in further social cuts to collect the costs for rearmament and war. At the same time, the trade war is expanding. The burden is borne by

workers on both sides of the Atlantic through mass dismissals, and wage and social cuts.

The IG Metall bureaucracy and its works council reps are responsible for implementing these attacks. And for this they are paid handsomely, which is why they take such vehement action against any opposition.

The apparatus not only knows every legal and dirty trick, it also has huge resources at its disposal. The “largest single trade union in the world” has an annual income of €600–650 million and assets (including reserves and real estate) in the multiple billions. The apparatus financed by this is the main obstacle to defending jobs and wages. It must be disempowered.

Workers in the German car and metal industries should take the American autoworker Will Lehman—who is running for the presidency of the US autoworkers’ union UAW (United Auto Workers)—as a role model. Like IG Metall in Germany, the UAW works most closely with the corporations and the government and supports Trump’s trade war and war policy.

“This bureaucracy cannot be reformed,” Lehman states clearly. “It must be abolished.” His programme focuses on transferring power from the apparatus to the workers on the shop floor through a network of rank-and-file committees. This is the only way to end the policy of “social partnership” with the corporations and replace it with a strategy of class struggle. This is the only way to reject the poison of nationalism, which divides workers across borders, and mobilise the industrial power of workers in defence of democratic rights and against war.

Will Lehman is a socialist and member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the sister party of the SGP in Germany. The International Committee of the Fourth International initiated the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) on May 1, 2021.

The attacks on the rights and conditions of workers are global. The strategy of the corporations can only be broken through cross-border coordination. The allies of autoworkers in Germany are the autoworkers in the US and the whole world. The worldwide building of rank-and-file committees and their networking is the task of the hour.



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