# IG Metall union and works council toast brutal cuts at German steel plant

**Philipp Frisch, Dietmar Gaisenkersting**
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Steelworkers in Duisburg are being subjected to an unprecedented assault on their livelihoods— planned, organised and enforced by the IG Metall union bureaucracy.

Thousands of jobs are being cut at Thyssenkrupp. At Hüttenwerke Krupp Mannesmann (HKM), IG Metall, the works council and management of Salzgitter Stahl AG have sealed the destruction of almost 2,000 of 3,000 jobs by signing a "social collective agreement."

Gerhard Erdmann, chief executive of the Steel Employers' Association and HKM's chief financial officer until 2023, told the local press on Monday: "What is coming now is worse than Rheinhausen."

By "Rheinhausen," Erdmann is referring to the closure of the Krupp steelworks in the Duisburg district of Rheinhausen, which triggered the longest industrial dispute in the history of then West Germany. When the Krupp corporation announced the closure of the steel plant in 1987, it still employed 6,300 workers. At that time, 200,000 people still worked in the West German steel industry. The Rheinhausen workforce responded by occupying the plant and staging numerous protests and demonstrations that drew in the entire region.

Even then, the IG Metall executive board in Frankfurt had long since agreed to the job cuts in the steel industry, including Rheinhausen. The union leadership put a brave face on it. They pretended to be fighting alongside the workforce, only to organise the sell-out of the Krupp workers behind their backs.

Today, 80,000 jobs remain in the German steel industry, and at least 7,000 of them are being destroyed in Duisburg alone. And what are the IG Metall apparatus and its works council representatives doing? They are trying to sell this jobs massacre as a great success and even as a measure to secure jobs. In a joint press statement, IG Metall and the HKM works council describe the restructuring of the company as "a courageous entrepreneurial decision of great importance for industrial policy in Duisburg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Germany as a steel production location."

"This is not a wind-down, this is an investment. This is the creation of an industrial future," enthuses Thomas Hay, IG Metall organisational secretary and deputy chairman of the HKM supervisory board. He continues: "At a time when many people feel that everything industrial in Germany is collapsing, this decision is a powerful counter-example." He accuses those who feel this way of deceiving themselves. "Often the feeling is bleaker than the reality. At HKM, we are now seeing that courageous decisions can change reality. That makes us very happy."

While union apparatchik Hay, from the vantage of his well-paid union post, rejoices over the destruction of jobs and the social gains of earlier generations, IG Metall evidently senses that such a brazen and cynical distortion of the facts could ignite anger and outrage.

Preemptively, Karsten Kaus, head of the IG Metall Duisburg-Dinslaken district office, declares: "Anyone who now speaks only of job cuts is falling far short of the mark." For the alternative to this "continuation plan," he says, would in the worst case have been outright closure. This is the logic of the corporation's blackmail: either you accept that two-thirds of the workforce are thrown out onto the street, or we shut the plant down completely. This is not the language of a workers' organisation, but of an accomplice of management.

The brutal cuts at HKM are the result of a years-long process, in the course of which IG Metall and the HKM works council have not lifted a finger to defend jobs but actively demobilised the workforce's resistance with impotent warning strikes and protest actions.

Ever since a closure of HKM was first put up for discussion four years ago, IG Metall has acted as an extended arm of the corporation. Instead of mobilising workers at HKM, at Thyssenkrupp—where a total of 11,000 jobs are likewise being destroyed through a "social collective agreement"—and across heavy industry as a whole for joint strikes and demonstrating their enormous power, they have ensured that workers' resistance remained as ineffective as possible.

In April 2025, when Thyssenkrupp announced the

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corporation would no longer source steel from HKM after 2032, Kaus proclaimed capitulation was the only option. One had to "prepare for the worst—namely, closure." Since then, the union has been peddling the proposal that the sale or takeover of HKM would "save" jobs. This was flanked by occasional protests and warning strikes, which served as safety valves for the workforce's anger.

"We don't want to strike," shop stewards' committee head Dengel called out to the assembled workers at a protest rally outside HKM in early February, thereby summing up the essential concern of the IG Metall apparatus in a single sentence.

When it became known in February this year that Thyssenkrupp and Salzgitter AG had agreed on the key terms for a full takeover of HKM by Salzgitter, leading IG Metall representatives expressed their enthusiasm, among them North Rhine-Westphalia district leader Knut Giesler, the head of IG Metall Duisburg-Dinslaken, Karsten Kaus and HKM shop stewards' committee head Philipp Dengel.

Marco Gasse, chairman of the HKM works council, declared: "For the moment, we are simply happy. It is now up to us as the works council to shape the transition fairly." Yet Salzgitter chief executive Gunnar Groebler had made clear from the outset that he planned to maintain steel production with only 1,000 of the 3,000 employees.

Some details of this "fair transition," in which IG Metall has played a decisive role, have been known since mid-July. At the centre of the "social collective agreement" is a massive job cull. Of the roughly 3,000 permanent staff and agency workers currently employed, around 1,800, more than half, will be laid off by June 30, 2029. Five hundred are to "leave voluntarily" by October 1 this year. On that date, one of the two remaining blast furnaces at the plant is to be taken out of operation. The second blast furnace is then to be replaced by an electric arc furnace in mid-2029 which will require little more than 1,000 employees to operate.

The restructuring is being touted under the slogan of "green" steel production. But this is not being pursued in the interest of the climate or of workers; rather, it serves as a lever to close plants, reduce workforces and secure profits amid an intensifying trade and economic war.

The works council and the union are supported by the Left Party. Its industrial policy parliamentary spokesman in the Bundestag, Mirze Edis, who is simultaneously a member of the HKM works council, launched into a hymn of praise for everyone involved after the takeover by Salzgitter was announced. Completely unabashed, he stated that he personally was "happy to have contributed to this success through numerous conversations with company chief executives."

In the name of the Left Party's Bundestag group, he expressed his thanks not only to the so-called "employee representatives" but also to the Salzgitter corporation, "which has taken on responsibility not only for HKM but has also stood up for the region [sic!]." Germany needed "more corporate leaderships of this kind, who also live up to their responsibility towards our regions," he said. This, he claimed, also helped democracy.

Edis is here openly displaying the role of the Left Party. While the Merz government drives forward its policies of war, brutal social cuts and the conversion of industry to war production at full steam, the Left Party sides with IG Metall, which is organising the cuts, and openly with the corporations drawing their profits from those cuts. By sabotaging the necessary struggle for workers' interests, the Left Party is not helping democracy but driving voters into the arms of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The experiences of recent years make one thing clear: at HKM and across industry as a whole, workers need new organisations of their own. Organisations that will fight uncompromisingly against the corporations' decades-long attacks, mobilising the full strength of the workers, without whom not a single kilo of steel is produced. The record of the IG Metall apparatus at HKM and elsewhere shows how urgently rank-and-file action committees, controlled by the workers themselves, need to be built.

Anyone unwilling to stand by while IG Metall surrenders job after job—and celebrates the cuts as a success—must act now. Workers can only defend their jobs by taking matters into their own hands, independently of the union apparatus, which has long since stood on the other side of the barricades.

*We call on all steelworkers, all employees at HKM, Thyssenkrupp and across the entire industry: build action committees with us, controlled by yourselves, which make no rotten compromises, and which fight for every single job! Get in touch with us. Fill out the form or send a message via WhatsApp to +491633378340.*

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