Germany: Demonstrations against social cuts, workers' anger met with trade union maneuvers

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The demonstrations and rallies against social cuts organized nationwide by the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) last Saturday were nothing less than a deceptive manoeuvre. The union bureaucracy pretends it is fighting the attacks by the federal government and corporations. The opposite is true. It is working in close collaboration with the government and corporations to push through social cuts and job destruction.

According to the DGB, 175,000 people heeded its call under the slogan "Hard-earned! Your work. Your health. Your pension." Demonstrations and rallies took place in 15 major cities, including Berlin, Essen, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, Hanover, Leipzig, Magdeburg and Stuttgart.

In its call to action, the DGB declared that "good and secure jobs, the best possible healthcare, and a reliable retirement income" were "non-negotiable." "We stand up against policies that cut benefits and curtail labor rights!"

This applies to many of those who heeded the DGB's call, but it does not apply to the speakers and organizers of the trade union federation. The leadership of the DGB and the individual unions are doing exactly the opposite.

Large delegations at all the demonstrations were organized by the engineering union, IG Metall. Yet the leadership of IG Metall and its shop floor representatives are currently working with industrial conglomerates to organize the elimination of hundreds of thousands of jobs. At VW, IG Metall has already agreed to the elimination of 75,000 jobs in Germany alone.

Tens of thousands of jobs are currently being eliminated at Mercedes, Bosch, ZF, in the chemical and steel industries and in many other sectors. And the leadership of IG Metall, IG BCE, Verdi and every other union are doing absolutely nothing to "fight" against this.

The unions' toothless protests—which they occasionally organize in the auto industry, as they did last Monday—serve, like the DGB's day of action last Saturday, solely to relieve pressure among the workforce and lull them into complacency. Meanwhile, they coordinate the implementation of these attacks on jobs and wages in collective bargaining agreements and social plans with corporate executives at the highest levels. Every social plan or "future collective bargaining agreement" that seals the mass destruction of jobs bears the signature of a union official who, on Saturday, was making speeches about "struggle" and "resistance."

Foto: Demonstration against social cuts in Stuttgart, September 26, 2026

When it comes to social cuts, too, the DGB apparatus does not stand on the side of the working people, but rather on the side of the government, the rich, and big business. At the rally in Essen—which drew 18,000 people, nearly twice as many as expected—DGB Chairwoman Yasmin Fahimi declared that "decent work, a strong welfare state, and a reliable pension" are the foundations of a strong society. "Our rights were won through the struggles of generations before us—and when they come under attack today, we stand together. We will not let them take away what we've worked so hard to achieve!"

So says the woman who, until 2022, when she took over as DGB chair, was a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) parliamentary group in the Bundestag, i.e., the same party that is currently leading the attacks on the welfare state from within government.

In 2014 and 2015, Fahimi even served as SPD Secretary-General. She subsequently served for nearly two years as State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs under Minister Andrea Nahles (SPD). As a member of the Bundestag, she voted in favor of every foreign deployment of the Bundeswehr. She also fully supported "comprehensive support for Ukraine" in the war against Russia. However, she rejected the admission of refugees from the Aegean Islands, just as she rejected the motion to "expressly advocate within the EU Council for the introduction of a comprehensive public country-by-country

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reporting requirement for multinational corporations" to combat tax evasion.

The Social Democrat and union leader, who on Saturday railed against the impoverishment of broad sections of the population, refused on May 14, 2020, in the Bundestag to raise the standard rate of basic income support for the poorest of the poor.

Fahimi and all union leaders stand on the government's side. They all support military buildup, the wars against Russia and Iran, and the genocide against the Palestinians. These central issues were not mentioned in the speeches by the union officials. Yet the rollback of social benefits is a direct consequence of this. The military budget will triple over the next five years, reaching over 150 billion euros by 2029. The cost of this military buildup—one trillion euros—is to be passed on to the working class.

In Essen, Fahimi called for "a growth agenda for Germany and Europe"; her husband, IG BCE Chairman Michael Vassiliadis, along with IGM President Christiane Benner and BDI President Peter Leibinger, elaborated what this means in an op-ed for the *Handelsblatt*: "Industry associations and industrial unions are jointly prepared to support an agenda for a sustainable Germany—one that reduces costs, including those incurred by the state, and increases the volume of work and productivity."

What notivates Fahimi and the bureaucracies is not the dismantling of the welfare state but the opposition to it. Saturday's nationwide day of action was intended to channel this opposition. The union leaderships fear that anger in workplaces and working-class neighborhoods will erupt beyond their control. "Especially in times when many workers fear for their jobs, solidarity-based safeguards and social cohesion are all the more important," Fahimi emphasized in Essen. And Maike Schollenberger, Verdi's regional director in Baden-Württemberg, warned in Stuttgart: "With the massive social imbalance caused by the reforms, the coalition is pouring oil on the fires of our democracy." Chancellor Merz must decide whether he really wants to risk a wildfire.

The DGB apparatus and its constituent unions want to prevent such a widespread uprising at all costs. They see their main task as suppressing the class struggle. That became clearer on Saturday. And something else became clear: All of the pseudo-left organizations fear the workers' uprising against the old bureaucratic apparatuses just as much as the apparatus itself. About 30 of their organizations—from the Left Party, the BSW, the Maoist MLPD, the Stalinist DKP and the myriad organizations within the Left Party—came to the bureaucrats' aid. All of them emphasized that the DGB and its individual unions are the most important organizations in the struggle against the government and must therefore be supported and defended.

But the opposite is true. These old, ossified organizations, whose bureaucracies hold the workforce in a stranglehold, are the very reason why the government of Chancellor Merz and Vice Chancellor Lars Klingbeil is able to wield the axe against the welfare state and the gains made in the workplaces. Their control over the workforce must be broken, not cemented.

Members of the Socialist Equality Party addressed participants directly at DGB demonstrations and rallies, calling on them to take action themselves and organize into action committees independent of the old apparatuses, in order to take up the struggle against social cuts, job destruction and their root cause—the escalating war for the redivision of the world.

They distributed leaflets containing the article on the upcoming collective bargaining negotiations in the metal and electrical industries, in which the IGM bargaining committee has already announced in advance that it intends to agree to real wage cuts, specifically in the interests of the auto industry.

The leaflets state: "This union bureaucracy is utterly hostile to the workforce; it must be overcome and abolished. It cannot be pressured 'from within' or 'pushed to the left.' Any attempt to 'reform' it leads to frustration and demoralization and ultimately strengthens the far right AfD."

The way forward lies in building independent action committees that are elected by the workers themselves, accountable to the workforce, and free from full-time union officials and works council barons. A program of struggle must be developed to defend jobs, wages, pensions and social benefits. This struggle must be directed equally against rearmament and war, for which the welfare state is being dismantled, jobs are being cut, and pensions and wages are being reduced.

Anyone who is seriously fighting against the government and its attacks on social gains and who wants to defend their jobs and wages, should contact us via WhatsApp at +49 163 3378340 or through the form below this article.

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