

CONVERSION PERVERT

or 'Swing right, march!' to the truce

'Swords into plowshares' - this slogan of the peace movement of the 1980s was - after initial considerable 'foreignness' - also a trade union fighting motto from 1983 at the latest, especially of IG Metall. At that time, arms conversion was at the heart of trade union struggles - today there is nothing left of it in concrete trade union workplace work! [In Görlitzis being , traditional wagon construction buried in favor of tank production - and IG Metall is applauding.](#)

The new purpose of the plant? The production of armaments for the Franco-German tank manufacturer KNDS. It is a **trade union** that exposes itself as a capitulation to the logic of war and the profit interests of the military-industrial complex - **beyond all trade union principles and decisions!** This finding is all the more significant because there is **still [great demand for Görlitz wagons](#)**. But the capital side wants **more profit - by relocating production** to cheaper Poland. **To this end, ALSTOM broke the [future collective agreement](#) signed in April 2024 after less than a year.**

That is why IG Metall will continue to fight ALSTOM in court in March...

'Clean up!' is the slogan. '*Don't let the thieves get away too cheaply*'.

'*Stop the thief!*' no longer works in times of a social partnership that has been unilaterally terminated by capital. This must be understood.

What was a central component of trade union struggles in the 1980s, 1990s and even up to the mid-2000s - **resistance to global wars, militarism and the war industry** - is now being actively betrayed by many works councils and trade union representatives under the motto "*job security - no matter what!*" and literally 'sold to the highest bidder' - as is now the case in Görlitz. The fact that parts for the Boxer wheeled armored vehicle are now being produced from the traditional production of rail vehicles no longer seems to be a problem for the responsible IG Metall representatives. The same trade union that was still campaigning for the conversion of armaments factories to civilian production in 2019 is now giving its blessing to the opposite approach. *Betrayal of peace - betrayal of its own resolutions and its own members!* **Yesterday ALSTOM, today KNDS. The players change, their principles remain. There is no such thing as 'good work' in the arms industry. That is why we must continue and intensify our fight for arms conversion, good work and wages from civilian production!**

The difficult rapprochement of the DGB trade unions with the peace movement and their later central role

On December 22, 1955, [the DGB Federal Executive Board issued a statement on the founding of the Bundeswehr in November](#), recognizable in the awareness of the *The 'anti-fascist consensus' of the post-war years was still quite clear: "A policy of full employment, adequate care for social pensioners, refugees and those unable to work and, above all, the right of co-determination of the workforce and trade unions in the economy are better guarantees for peace and security than armored divisions."* The decisive means that alone can guarantee peace and security is the **creation of socially just and economically sensible conditions.**

And in a [resolution of the DGB Congress in October 1956](#), it stated in clear opposition to the introduction of compulsory military service: "***In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federal Government and the Bundestag have decided to establish a 'Bundeswehr' on the basis general compulsory military service, ignoring the warnings and expressions of will of the trade unions. The DGB regrets this development. It continues to reject rearmament in both parts of Germany. The DGB will support the forces that are willing to use democratic means reverse the rearmament in a divided Germany and the compulsory military service***".

But **less than two and a half years later** - although the DGB and IG Metall chairmen Willi Richter and Otto Brenner were prominently involved in [the 'Fight committee Nuclear Death'](#) - the DGB trade unions were unable to bring themselves to take further action in the fight against the stationing of US nuclear weapons in Germany. **The DGB rejected general strikes or even the proposed symbolic stoppage of work for five minutes.**

And although many trade unionists were an active part of the [Easter march movement of the 1960s](#) and signed the calls for Easter marches, the DGB executive board was initially critical of the Easter marches [in the anti-communist Cold War climate following the KPD ban in 1956](#), even to the point of

'[Distancing in the crudest form](#)' and [an official ban on participation](#): At the end of March 1961, the DGB Federal Executive Board unanimously passed a resolution that not only warned against participation in the Easter marches, but also expressly prohibited participation in the Easter marches. However, this decision could not be upheld, as there was a danger that it would be disregarded so often that disciplinary measures would have been neither organizationally nor politically feasible. When the IG Metall youth conference then called for support for the Easter marches in 1962, this had a signal effect on the entire trade union youth. A series of youth conferences of the individual trade unions followed this example. After IG Metall, IG Chemie, Papier und Keramik and IG Druck und Papier had made it **'optional'** for their members to **take part in the Easter marches** by February 1964, albeit without calling for participation themselves, the DGB inevitably adopted a similar position. According to a new resolution passed in January 1964, 'only' signatures with function designations were to be omitted...

The rapprochement of the DGB trade unions with the peace movement in the 1980s was also a laborious and conflict-laden process. At the beginning of the decade, the DGB was still reticent about the NATO double-track decision initiated by SPD Chancellor Helmut Schmid in 1979 and avoided positioning itself on the issue at all in its election recommendations in 1980.

A vivid example of these conflicts was the **reprimand of Georg Benz**, an executive board member of IG Metall. Benz had given a speech as an IG Metall representative at the first [Hofgarten demonstration](#) in Bonn in October 1981, **clearly positioning himself against nuclear armament, even though the DGB federal executive board had expressly forbidden its sub-organizations from calling for participation in the demonstration as late as August 1981.** The motto of the demonstration, in which more than 300,000 people took part, was: "**Acting together against the nuclear threat.** Georg Benz's courageous commitment drew the attention of the then IG Metall chairman Eugen Loderer, who sharply criticized Benz for his unauthorized appearance. Loderer saw this as a *'inadmissible solo effort that was not coordinated with the official line of the union'*.

This episode illustrates how difficult it was for trade unions to position themselves within the peace movement and how strong the internal resistance to an explicit peace policy was at first.

Despite these differences, a closer connection between the DGB and the peace movement developed in the years after 1983. IG Metall and the trade union youth in particular played an increasingly active role in mobilizing for peace demonstrations.

The '**Peace Autumn 1983**' demonstrated the growing commitment of the trade unions. With actions such as the **five-minute '5 to 12' reminder pause on October 5, in which numerous trade union members took part, the DGB signaled a clear position against nuclear armament for the first time.**

This commitment continued to grow in following years as the trade unions became increasingly involved in debates on disarmament and conversion. It became clear that **trade union involvement in the peace movement was not only a moral but also a strategic necessity: an alternative industrial policy to secure jobs in a post-militarized economy became a central concern.**

The [DGB's appeal for Anti-War Day](#) still states this in 2019:

*"**Never again war! Never again fascism!**" This is the response of the trade unions to the immeasurable suffering that Nazi Germany brought upon the world when it invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, thus triggering the catastrophe of the Second World War. Eighty years after the start of the Nazis' horrific war of extermination, we have every reason to remember on Anti-War Day where the resurgence of blind nationalism and militarism, misanthropy and racism can lead.*

Democracy, peace and freedom cannot be taken for granted, but must be resolutely defended. Nobody knows this better than we trade unions. That is why we have been a central part of the peace movement from the very beginning and have contributed to its successes. But we also know that **our fight against fascism, nationalist warmongering and a mindless arms race is far from over.** On the contrary: today we live in a world in which our trade union commitment to a strong peace movement is particularly called for. (...)

*The enemies of democracy, autocrats and authoritarian regimes are on the rise around the world. They are stirring up new enemy stereotypes. They are instrumentalizing the deep insecurity that triggers the feeling among many people that they are living in a world that has gone completely off the rails. **A world characterized a growing number of armed conflicts. A world in which 70 million people are fleeing war and civil war, political persecution, natural disasters and poverty.***

All these problems can only be solved with fewer rather than more weapons. Emphasize this demand, the DGB is involved in the peace initiative 'Disarm instead of rearm'. More than 150,000 supporters have now signed its appeal against NATO's two percent target. We are publicly calling on people to co-sign the appeal and take part in the initiative's numerous actions."

In the long term, until the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the DGB trade unions contributed to peace and disarmament being understood as social and economic policy issues that could not be viewed in isolation from the workers' perspective. The issue of peace was thus recognized and focused on as a social issue, which further intensified the social conflict between capital interests and workers' rights.

"We can only solve the problems that exist on our planet in a civilian way. To do this, we have to stop the military, everywhere! In people's minds, in the media and in politics. And we don't just want to make conversion an issue with new momentum, we also want to drive it forward in practice. Disarming instead of rearming, that is the urgent task for all of us!" [Wolfgang Lemb, Executive Member of the Executive Board of IG Metall](#), at the DFG-VK Federal Congress on 09.11.2019)

Trade union participation in the peace movement was ultimately an expression of the realization that **defending the interests of the working population is inextricably linked to the fight against militarism and war**. Despite initial resistance, the **trade unions** thus became **one of the most important social forces in the fight for a more peaceful and socially just world**.

"The long-term goal must be to completely abolish arms production and arms exports worldwide. There must be no arms exports from Germany to crisis regions give. IG Metall must advocate more strongly than before for compliance with the provisions of the Basic Law that prohibit actions that likely to disrupt the peaceful coexistence of peoples, in particular the waging of a war of aggression and the deployment of the Bundeswehr beyond national defense (Art. 2c, 87a Basic Law). (...)

IG Metall rejects any political actions and decisions that promote conflicts and wars as well as the pursuit of geopolitical interests under the pretext of humanitarian aid. Wars have never been a means of conflict resolution and must be rejected for this reason, also in accordance with § 2 of our statutes." ([Resolution "Peace Policy and Arms Conversion"](#) of the 23rd Trade Union Congress of IG Metall from 22.10.2015)

A historic genuflection - IG Metall in a truce with the war profiteers

However, what has been since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in the course of the **militarization of public discourse** and **Germany's war-making capability** in the trade unions and above all in their boardrooms, contrary to all important and hard-won insights and positioning described above, has a name: [Burgfrieden!](#)

The conversion of the wagon factory in Görlitz into an armored forge is exemplary of the capitulation of the DGB and its member unions (here the IGM) to the SPD-led olive-green-helmeted war government and the military-industrial complex. Already in the run-up to the **First World War** and also during the mass slaughter of the first industrial war, the **trade union leadership, in cronyism with the MSPD, betrayed the working class by siding with the war profiteers and their political stooges in the name of a fantasized "national responsibility"**; the similarities to today are no coincidence...

Back then, millions of workers were first driven into the trenches and then into a mass grave. Today, history is repeating itself as a farce when IG Metall, together with corporate bosses and the German government, wants to switch from civilian to military use. War production sold as a "good solution"!

The words of Mirko Schultze (Die Linke) at the protest rally in Görlitz hit the nail on the head: *"In the logic of the militaristic turn of an era, employees must hope for further armament measures or even wars in order secure their livelihoods in the future - perverse conversion!"*

A perfidious game of life and death that the IG Metall leadership is willing to play along with.

Anyone who deludes people into believing that job security can be achieved through militarization and war is selling out the future of workers to the military-industrial complex. There is no 'good work' in the arms industry, just as there is no right life in the wrong one. So the question must be: **What kind of world do we want to live in?** *"A trade union response would be to raise awareness of these contradictions among colleagues. 'We also have something to do with how an opinion is formed in the mind,' writes the former chairman of IG Metall, Jürgen Peters. 'If we remain silent on political issues, if we remain silent when the untruth is knowingly spoken, if we duck away, then we leave the field to others. Then we shouldn't be surprised if the mainstream becomes more and more entrenched in our minds.'" (U. Eifler; [The trade unions must not duck away](#))*

Workers and their families, in Görlitz wagon construction and at supplier companies and wherever else, works council and IGM, economy and society can ultimately only get out of the material and experienced predicament **'armaments work or unemployed'** through the common and solidary struggle against militarism, war and the logic of capital exploitation oriented solely towards maximum profit: **tank production means war and death, not good work and life! Swords to plowshares!**

Criticism of the union leadership - resistance is growing!

On May 1, 2024, the chairman of the ver.di trade union, Frank Werneke, gave a speech at the DGB rally in Munich **that could hardly be surpassed in terms of flatness and emptiness in view of the warlike and increasingly unbearable world situation. The increasingly [aggressive militarization of society as a whole](#)** - especially in Bavaria! - he did not say a word. And yet there is trade union resistance here too: **[our children not for their war!](#)** Werneke did not mention the **100 billion militarization war loan package**, on the contrary: **"If there are 100 billion special funds for armaments, then they can also be used for social purposes...** You have to let that melt in your mouth.

Anyone who, like Mr Werneke, remains silent about the unprecedented rearmament and militarization of society as a whole, which the ruling classes and their executive committees in the governments are currently carrying out, should remain silent about the massive 'social cuts' being carried out at the same time! For social demands must remain toothless if they do not take into account that **war and social theft are two sides of the same coin.** Even the **increasingly shrill attacks on the right to strike** can only be understood if they are seen as **part of the internal disciplining** that is associated with **of 'war capability' to the outside world.**

And the IG Metall leadership also remains silent or legitimizes the conversion perversion as in Görlitz with flimsy arguments. [Dirk Schulze, IG Metall district manager for Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony](#), explains: "*Certainly not everyone is happy about the conversion to the production of defense technology. I can understand that. But it is undeniable that we - unfortunately - need this production in these times.*" Really?!!! That's the military-industrial complex talking!!!

There is NO IG Metall resolution on this! Just as little as for the unspeakable collaboration paper 'SOVERÄNITÄT UND RESILIENZ SICHERN - INDUSTRIEPOLITISCHE LEITLINIEN UND INSTRUMENTE FÜR EINZUKFUNFÄFTSFÄHIGE SICHERHEITS- UND VERTEIDIGUNGSINDUSTRIE', which the IGM Executive Board signed and published WITHOUT EMERGENCY and against all resolutions of its own organization, with the warmongers of the SPD Wirtschaftsforum e.V. and the Bundesverband der Deutschen Sicherheits- und Verteidigungsindustrie e.V., the lobby association of German arms manufacturers and war profiteers, in January 2024.

[Uwe Garbe, First Authorized Representative of IG Metall Ostsachsen](#), is blunt about what is here: "*If production continues on the Alstom site in Görlitz the future, this is a huge opportunity for the region, and we won't turn our backs on it.*" The main thing is production - no matter what! Even war equipment and killing machines, as long as they are covered by collective agreements and the Works Constitution Act is complied with!

When the same union official points in the aforementioned interview with the Sächsische Zeitung that he suspects that the works council's refusal to make a public statement is due to the fact that there are significant sections of the workforce who do NOT agree with this form of conversion, and that (on the day of the political spectacle nobody "wants to jeopardize the agreement with KNDS in the final stages, for example by making *certain information about which confidentiality has been agreed public too early. In addition, the colleagues do not even know the modalities of the takeover by KNDS*", then he makes it blatantly clear that the IGM has obviously (at least partially) negotiated behind the backs of the workforce and the works council committee - albeit probably out of a well-meaning paternalistic attitude...

This is exactly what we need to stand up against. Precisely THIS capitulatory, pointless, The trade union's commitment to the fight for peace, social security and against the further exploitation of our environment must not be overlooked in the face of the union leadership's ingratiating position, which is not covered by any decision of the organization (the term 'attitude' is out of the question here!). And in doing so, we are not overlooking the difficult situation of the East Saxony region and the colleagues affected - on the contrary!

Resistance is already stirring! The demonstrators in front of the factory gate in Görlitz show that not everyone is accepting this jagged march to the right by the trade union leadership into a new truce without criticism or resistance. Trade unionists like Angelika Teweleit are calling for the public takeover of such plants under democratic control. Instead of using taxpayers' money guarantee armaments companies profits until they burst their sacks, we need a sustainable, democratically controlled industrial policy that steers the change towards civilian production and ecological restructuring.

"When the great majority of the working people come to the conviction (...) that wars a barbaric, deeply immoral, reactionary and anti-popular phenomenon, then wars will have become impossible." [R. Luxemburg, defense speech on February 20, 1914 before the Frankfurt Criminal Chamber](#) in the trial for her calls to 'fight against the danger of war' - six months before August 4, 1914, the day the war credits were approved in the Reichstag...

Over 25.000 people, mainly unionized colleagues, support the grassroots initiative '[SAGT NEIN! Trade unionists against war, militarism and truce](#)'. [Streetcar drivers refuse to ride streetcars covered with camouflage and Bundeswehr advertising](#). **Over 6.000 trade unionists** are signing their names and organizational memberships to the call '[Trade unions against armament and war! Peace capability instead of war capability](#)'.

*"In order to secure profitability, ownership structures and company hierarchies even in acute crises or to align the political framework more closely with current profit requirements, **capital owners, managers or lobby associations have often acted as supporters of authoritarian forces, sometimes even as stooges of fascism.** (...) **This is why the comprehensive activities of trade unions in the political arena are so important.** (...) **Co-determination in the development and establishment of transformation plans in companies is necessarily linked to influencing the structure of the new value chains and the necessary investments. Co-determination thus into the core area of private capitalist property rights.** (...)*

*The struggle for pre-democratic capitalist conditions must also and above all be waged where the architecture of capitalism has its supporting pillar: in the places of capital utilization, i.e. in the workplaces and the economy." (H.-J. Urban (managing board member of the IGM (exceptions prove the rule!); *Der Betrieb als Kampffeld gegen rechts*; in [SOZIALISMUS 1_25](#); p. 38 - 45).*

This also clearly contradicts precisely those who are now claiming that such ' **STANDORT-** ("*a military term for a place where troops, military units, etc. are permanently housed*") **security** ', as in Görlitz, is quasi '*preventive trade union work against the 'right'...*'

The exact opposite is the case!!! And historical experience speaks for this: **the organized workers' movement's prostration before the military-industrial complex leads directly from the site into the dugout, first into the trenches and then into the mass grave!**

However, in **January 1918**, it was also the **almost one million workers on strike, who went on strike mainly arms factories across Germany**, under the slogan '**Peace and Bread!**', who - after the October Revolution in Russia two months earlier - struck another **decisive blow against the mass slaughter of the First World War** and marked the **beginning of the revolutionary movement in Germany**, which on November 9, 1918, led to **the fall of the German Kaiserreich, the November Revolution** and, in 1919, **the founding of the Weimar Republic**, the first democracy on German soil.

What kind of world do we want to live in?

The social partnership-based class compromise has long since been terminated by the capital side - ALSTOM in Görlitz is just one of the most recent blatant examples of this. **Arrangements that are fundamentally based on conflict and partnership** are increasingly being **refused** and actively **torpedoed** at the level of **collective agreements** and **works councils** - **union busting** and **works council bashing** are spreading.

Social cuts and rearmament two sides of the same coin. 'The **new truce** is aimed at the **authoritarian rule of the militaristic turnaround** and at ensuring that the **population, 'corona-steeled', goes along with unpopular' measures as uncritically as possible** and is **increasingly prepared to do so, 'new realities' and 'radical changes of course'** - even **without public debate and political discussion**, as was recently the case with the **'men's agreement'** between wartime Chancellor Scholz and former US President Joe Biden on the [stationing of nuclear first-strike weapons in Germany](#) from 2026. The **attacks on the welfare state are already part of the government's program** and will intensify after the Bundestag elections - regardless of which government is in power. The **lobbyists' demands for massive restrictions on the right to strike** are on the parties' desks and **will become more massive in direct proportion to the worsening of the crisis**. The pace at which the **rich are getting richer** and the **social gap is increasing massively in the current times of war** - as it always has.

The **authoritarian security state** has been taking **on an increasingly restrictive form** for years, while the **militarization of public space** not stop at **children's rooms, schools, universities, cinemas, pizza boxes and bread bags**. **Those who wage war on the outside cannot afford resistance on the inside!** All of this leads to **real burdens and worries for many people** and prepares **the ground for nationalist incitement and racist bias - grist to the mill of the eternally outdated**.

Active trade union engagement FOR the needs of those dependent on dependent employment under capitalism and AGAINST the militaristic turn of an era is the most consistent and ultimately the only promising form of anti-fascist organizing.

It is certainly true that **the reasons why the trade union movement arms conversion - like the peace movement as a whole - has become weaker and weaker over the years are not only due to the leadership and individual leaders of the trade unions, associations and parties**. We must all ask ourselves whether we have been **too content and sedate** in recent years, if that is what we want. In this respect, my colleague **Uwe Garbe**, first authorized representative of IG Metall Ostsachsen, is not wrong in the [interview with the Sächsische Zeitung](#) quoted above when he asks where the demonstrators against the KNDS takeover were in the past three years, when already discussions and battles in Görlitz about the continued existence of the wagon construction company and the future collective agreement. **However, hiding behind this legitimate question is not okay** - or in the words of colleague Garbe himself: **'too '**, because it **clearly distracts and is intended to distract from the political responsibility of the IGM as an organization** - a **strategy**, by the way, that has been known as **part of the 'iron law of oligarchy'** since the emergence of the full-time apparatuses in the mass organizations of the organized labour movement.

This makes it all the more important **to focus on the here and now. Especially if the analysis agrees that there needs to be more class-autonomous commitment from the grassroots in order to PREVENT such excesses as now in Görlitz (in the future).** Specifically: **What can we learn from this for our own current and future trade union and political PRACTICE?** By the time it gets to point where **tanks are being built instead of wagons, soldiers' helmets instead of cooking pots and armored pipes instead of pipes for installations,** it will already be too late.

The workers' struggle in the January strikes of 1918 **was a courageous act of self-empowerment against the ADGB executive committees, which were firmly tied to the war economy in the truce. The implementation of the Easter March idea in the DGB trade unions in the 1960s and the mass participation of trade unionists took place against the anti-communist agitation and blindness of their executive boards. The DGB and its individual trade unions as the mainstay of the peace movement of the 1980s in West Germany would not have conceivable without the committed struggle and acts of self-empowerment of the rank and file and the experience of self-efficacy with a class-autonomous standpoint against large sections of the executive committees and apparatuses.** All this is encouraging and instructive:

The trade union belongs to the members - not to the boards and apparatuses; and certainly not to the arms lobby or the government!

Trade unions are only as strong as their militant members. On May 01, 1919 Antonio Gramsci called on the workers: *"Educate yourselves, because we need all your wisdom. Move, because we need all your enthusiasm. Organize yourselves, because we need all your strength."* **It is time for workers and peace activists to remember this demand even more than they already do and to fight back against the suicidal course taken by their executive boards and apparatuses.** The alternative to *"swords to plowshares"* in times of global war madness is not *"Plowshares to tanks"*, but a clear and loud **NO! Against war, militarism and truce!**

"What is safe is not safe.

It won't stay as it is.

When the rulers have spoken, the ruled will speak.

Who dares to say: never?

Whose fault is it if the oppression remains? On us. Whose fault is it if it is broken?

Also to us." (B. Brecht; In Praise of Dialectics)

The proletariat has no fatherland!

Workers do not shoot at workers!

Do not become part of the war machine!

Let us finally smash the hands of those who publicly wage, justify and prepare wars!

"For mankind is threatened by wars against which the past ones are like paltry attempts, and they will come without any doubt if the hands of those who prepare them in public are not smashed." - Bertolt Brecht, Speech for Peace, 1952.

Never again fascism! Never again war!

We were. We are. We will be.

Andreas Buderus

Co-initiator of the trade union grassroots initiative [SAGT NEIN! Trade unionists against war, militarism and truce](#)