

Who are we ?

● The International Workers Committee Against War, Exploitation, for a Workers' International (IWC) was set up at the World Conference held in Mumbai (India) on November 19, 20, 21, 2016 gathering delegates from 28 countries.

● The IWC was set up on the basis of the Mumbai Manifesto against war, exploitation and precarious labour which was endorsed by labour activist and trade union and political organisations officers from 46 countries (*)

● Its continuations committee is composed of labour activists from all political/ trade union backgrounds:
Innocent Assogba (Benin),
Alan Benjamin (USA),
Colia Clark (USA),
Constantin Cretan (Romania),
Berthony Dupont (Haiti),
Ney Ferreira (Brazil),
Daniel Gluckstein (France),
Rubina Jamil (Pakistan),
Apo Leung (China),
M.A. Patil (India),
Mandlenkosi Phangwa (Azania),
Sergio Pineda (Mexico),
Klaus Schüller (Germany),
Jung Sikhwa (Korea),
John Sweeney (Great Britain),
Mark Vassilev (Russia),
Nambiath Vasudevan (India).

(*) Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Azania, Belarus, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Korea, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

For a workers' survey

Throughout the world – although in different forms – workers and their organizations are facing problems relative to the pandemic, its consequences, government policies and the positions taken by the labour movement.

We do not hide the fact that, on the basis of facts, we wish to illustrate what we have repeatedly said in all the IWC documents: the capitalist system - based on private ownership of the means of production - is driving the whole society to the brink. The positive solution to the unprecedented crisis facing mankind is in the hands of the working class.

This highlights the question of the independence of the labour movement from the capitalist class and the governments that serve it.

The results of this survey will provide the material for the preparation of the second international conference against war and exploitation, for a workers' international (which will be held, in application of our commitments, when conditions for traveling and meeting have returned to normal).

In order to facilitate the circulation of documents (in English, French and Spanish) among organizations, groups and activists of all tendencies from the 53 countries that have called for the conference, we kindly ask you to limit your contributions to 10,000 or 20,000 characters (2,000 to 4,000 words).

The 8 questions that make up this survey were published in newsletter n° 164 and are available upon request.

Already published:

- 1- Pakistan. Author: All-Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF) - Date: October 5th, 2020
- 2- Canada. Author: Activists involved in IWC campaigns - Date: October 12th, 2020
- 3- Australia. Author : Australia Asia Worker Links – Date: November 14th, 2020
- 4- Indonesia. Author : Dian Trisnanti, Chair Person F-SBPI - Date : November 25th, 2020
- 5- Benin. Author: Innocent Assogba – Date: November 25th, 2020

Report n° 6

GERMANY

Author: Klaus Schüller, member of the IWC Follow-up Committee and H.-W. Schuster, co-editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Freie Plattform für Arbeiterpolitik* – December 1st, 2020

1/ What have the consequences of the health crisis for the population been – especially for the working class? What has the COVID impact been on employment, how many jobs have been lost?

With the almost unanimous decision of March 25, when all the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag accepted the "recovery plan" which at the time amounted to about 1300 billion euros, the bases were in place for the banks and capitalists to organize hundreds of thousands of layoffs - under the control of the banks, speculation and hedge funds, etc., which grant the loans, but which above all are manoeuvring to decide whether or not to grant them.

And this at our expense, at the expense of workers who have been forced into partial unemployment by the millions (6.7 million workers in partial unemployment in May, who receive only 60 to 67 % of their last net salary), as well as precarious workers,

temporary workers and part-time workers, who have been reduced to unemployment by the hundreds of thousands. There were indeed 6.3 million unemployed in October. The number of officially unemployed in October 2020 was 2.76 million - 556,000 more than in 10/2019, to which must be added 3.552 million workers in "underemployment" (according to the ILO definition) – 420,000 more than in 10/2019. A further sharp increase is expected in the winter months. The budgets of the Länder, and even more so the municipal budgets, have been organized in such a way as to provide for "restrictions on municipal services" – with incalculable consequences for public services and the so-called welfare state.

Volkswagen wants to cut 6,000 jobs again. BMW wants to accelerate the down-sizing. That list could be extended. However, it must be clear to us that this is not an industry that is struggling. These are areas of the

industry that are only "moderately profitable" for capital. They are making profits, but not enough. The unlimited funds made available by the federal and State governments in Germany, which are officially supposed to "get the economy and jobs back on track", are in fact being used by companies to restructure, i.e. to cut tens of millions of jobs that they consider "unproductive" or "moderately profitable".

2/ Are there any figures available concerning the lives lost of workers in general and particularly front-line workers, including doctors and other hospital staff?

Meanwhile, 15% of nurses and doctors in some hospitals have Covid. The Grand Coalition demands that they still work with infected patients: *"The truth is that without this exceptional regulation, in some parts of Germany, in some hospitals and geriatric care facilities, care would not be possible today (...). We would then have patients or people in need of care, who would have no care at all, because everyone would be in quarantine,"* explains the CDU Health Minister. According to the Robert Koch Institute, 5 % of all people declared infected work in medicine and care. It should be pointed out – with reference to question 6 – that women are more at risk than average from these attacks: in 2019, women in Germany accounted for about 83 % of all people statutorily employed in geriatric care. In the nursing sector, the proportion of women is 80 %. The pressure on employees in hospitals and care institutions has been unbearable for decades. As early as 2013, the union responsible for the health sector, ver. di, determined that 162,000 service positions were unfilled. There is a shortage of 120,000 jobs in care facilities. As a result of the pandemic, this situation has worsened considerably. But if you only look at the approximately 28,000 intensive care beds in hospitals, which are supposed to prove the so-called good hospital situation in Germany, you don't see the reality. There is not even one caregiver per bed! The system is on the verge of collapse.

3/ What measures were taken or not taken by the government to cope with the pandemic? Were any wage

deductions imposed by the bosses and governments?

From March to May 2020, the proportion of employees who, facing imminent dismissal, were forced to apply for a lower-paid position reached 32.5 %, an increase of 3.3 % over the previous year.

Employees suffered a real wage loss of 4.7 % in the second quarter of 2020. *"This is,"* writes the Federal Statistical Office, *"historically the largest year-on-year decline in nominal and real wages since benchmarking began in 2007, and therefore sharper than during the financial market crisis of 2008/2009."* This is the impact of the decline in collective bargaining agreements covering employees: since 2000 the rate of coverage by a collective agreement has fallen from 55 % to 45 % in the East and from 70 % to 56 % in the West.

4/ What new attacks against workers' rights and democracy were launched by the bosses and governments during this year, as they took advantage of the pandemic?

In the metal and electricity industry alone, capital threatens to destroy 200,000 jobs. Nevertheless, the workers are not accepting the blackmail and threats. They are fighting for wages and the defence of all jobs (e.g. MAN and Conti), even if - as for example at Galeria Karstadt Kaufhof (supermarket chain) - they have not succeeded in completely preventing the closure of branches.

Attacks on trade unionists, works councils and staff representatives are increasing, and many are threatened with dismissal.

14 million employees work from home in the largely completely deregulated "coronavirus-induced" "teleworking".

The first measure taken by the government and capital – with the approval of the trade union leadership – was the unravelling of the law on working time (see point 2.)

What is qualitatively new and widespread is that the federal and State governments govern by ordinance under the Infection Protection Act. The measures taken under the guise of COVID-19 are decided entirely by the government by ordi-

nance, not by Parliament. This law allows restrictions on freedom of assembly, freedom to practice a profession, inviolability of the home and post. For example, decrees restricting freedom of assembly have severely impeded demonstrations, rallies, and strikes, but this did not prevent strikers from exercising their right - while maintaining social distancing.

5/ For years, the number of workers in the informal sector has continued to increase. The fight against precarious labour must lead the labour movement to think about organizing these workers. The workers in the informal sector have paid a very heavy price in the health crisis. What has their situation been since March 2020? What reactions has this triggered?

Already last year, precarious employment increased massively: two out of three new hires last year were in so-called non-standard jobs. Out of a total of nearly 10.3 million new hires in jobs subject to social security contributions, 6.6 million, or 65 %, were made outside of a full-time permanent employment contract. In 2019, approximately four million new hires, or 40 %, were on fixed-term contracts. 3.9 million, or 35 % of new hires, were part-time positions. 9 % of all new hires, or approximately one million, were temporary workers. The more than 2,000 infected temporary and contract workers, mainly from Eastern Europe, crammed in inhumane conditions in mass housing by the meat multinational Tönnies, in the Gütersloh district alone, illustrate the special situation of precarious workers, but also the cases of illness in Amazon's warehouses. However, the meat company, whose operations were shut down in part because of the huge number of infected workers, was able to file claims for reimbursement of wage costs under the Infection Protection Act. Bourgeois law allows that!

There has been no decrease in the number of strikes in Germany. Strikes have taken place in the railways, the post office, the civil service, hospitals and local public transport, etc.

For more than two weeks, employees of the jam manufacturer Lausitzer Früchteverarbeitung went on strike for a collective bargaining agreement and

hourly wage increases from 11 to 12 euros.

6/ Women workers have also been particularly hit. They are the first to lose their jobs, the last to be taken back at their work places when they reopen. They have to take in charge their children deprived of schooling. Domestic violence has increased with the lockdown. What form has it taken? What mobilisations have taken place to defend the rights of working women?

In Germany, women earn on average 20 % less than men. 66.2 % of women work part-time. Of the 2.5 million (2018) people with fixed-term contracts, women are in the majority. Fixed-term, part-time work and work in occupations "typical" for women, such as education, social work, care work, the retail trade, etc., are accompanied by lower incomes. Women therefore suffer more poverty and social exclusion in any case. And this translates into massive poverty in old age. Compared to men (1,148 euros), women only receive a pension of 711 euros. In Germany, people with less than 60 percent of the average household income - currently 1,035 euros - are considered at risk of poverty. A single person with less than 781 euros per month is considered poor. So retired women are poor!

7/ With the new technologies, the capitalists dismantle labour relations, restructure companies and destroy jobs. What are the consequences and what are the threats to labour relations in the coming period?

Of course, working "at home" in totally deregulated conditions, on the kitchen table (especially still for women!) has increased enormously. In October, according to the Federal Ministry of Labor, 35 % of employees in Germany (14 million!) were already

fully or partially teleworking. According to the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), even 40 % of all employees could theoretically work from home.

This is central to the atomization of the workforce and is directed against their united collective action. Fixed and regulated working hours are being blurred, with childcare periods when kindergartens and schools are closed (again, this affects women in particular!), there is no longer any mention of bonus working conditions such as for night work or public holidays and weekends; collective bargaining agreements are not respected and are not monitored.

8/ What were the positions of workers' organisations and their leaderships during that period? What were the demands? What was their attitude towards the plans designed by the bosses and governments?

The SPD, which had nearly one million members 30 years ago, now has well under half that number (about 412,000). In 2018 – when its leadership hinted that a break with the Grand Coalition was possible – the SPD was able to quickly gain new members, who were completely lost when its leadership rejoined the Grand Coalition. In 2017, it had only 9.5 million votes, down from 20 million in 1998. More than half of the "traditional voters" and more than half of its members have left!

The position of a representative of the DGB: *"this is not the time to put the social partnership to the test – we have to work closely together,"* describes the basic attitude of the trade union leadership in Germany.

The outcome of collective bargaining in the public sector has been called "respectable" by ver.di's president; it is an outcome that leads to real

wage losses. IG Metall has entered the negotiations for the metal and electricity industry with a demand of 4 % and proposes – paid out of the deferred wages of the workers – compensation for possible reductions in working time.

But the government is not in a position to fully implement the "Sacred Union". This "sacred union" of 2020 is based on the attempt to maintain a position claiming that the pandemic is the real catastrophe that affects everyone equally – capital and the working class alike. Of course, COVID-19 is a catastrophe. However, it has its roots in the capitalist system, which (see above), despite prior knowledge of the dangers of the pandemic, has not organized prevention for 8 years, even though the material basis for it was (and still is) absolutely present. On this basis of the "sacred union", on 25.3.2020, the billions of euros of aid to banks and capital were approved almost unanimously in the Bundestag, in the name of saving companies and jobs, but in fact in order to destroy production and jobs which, according to the capitalists, are only "moderately profitable".

In this situation, the permanent request to the leaders of the traditional organization in Germany to break the "sacred union" takes on special significance. The explanation of what this "sacred union" means in concrete terms – "sacred union" being the basis for the anti-worker measures of government and capital – for the working and living conditions of the working class is indispensable as a basis for the development of a force capable of enforcing the break. At the centre of this process is the discussion and the anchoring of the demands for the banning of all dismissals in relation to the demand for a reduction in weekly working hours, with full compensation of wages.. ■