
Interview: Walter Boehnke

'All unions must oppose IMF conditionalities'

Walter Boehnke is a factory council member of a firm in the bread and bakery goods industry in Schleswig-Holstein, West Germany. At the founding conference of the German section of the Club of Life on May 28 in Karlsruhe, he was elected as a member of the board of the Club of Life. The following interview was conducted by Aglaja Corleis.

EIR: As you said in your speech in Karlsruhe, there is no economic upswing in sight. Where do you see a solution and what demands should the unions promote?

Boehnke: I see the following solution: the German economy is based on exports. If we could not export any more, then the German economy sooner or later would stagnate, and unemployment will increase even more. I see the following way out: The German trade unions should demand that the world monetary system be changed, so that the Third World countries may again export and import: The Third World countries must obtain credit on the most favorable terms, so that they can buy the goods they need in the industrialized nations.

I hold that the demand for a 35-hour week is not necessary, if, as I said, exports were cranked up again. Then there would be so much work that a 35-hour week would be unthinkable.

EIR: Mr. Boehnke, you are a member of the North-South Labor Committee of the Club of Life, which was founded last October on the initiative of Colombian trade union leader Pedro Rubio. What tasks do you see for cooperation between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres?

Boehnke: I think that the task of the unions of the northern hemisphere should be to support the demands of the unions in the underdeveloped countries, in order to express a clear solidarity. I have in mind particularly the demand of the Mexican and South American unions for the abolition of the conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund, since the industrialization of the underdeveloped countries can and must take place, in order for us to create the chances of survival here. The German trade unions and the unions of the industrialized nations should fully and totally support this demand.

I think the unions do have a certain power. They ought therefore to use this power for once, to clearly and meaning-

fully say what is wrong here, why we are sick, and to bring this power to weigh in the political balance.

EIR: Thus one can at the same time end unemployment here and further the industrialization of the so-called South.

Boehnke: Yes, that is in my opinion the highest priority task of all unions.

EIR: How do you judge the danger that the "Green" anti-industrial circles will gain power in the unions?

Boehnke: The fact alone of the Green Party's demand for the abolition of the trade unions is a great danger, and I believe that the German trade union movement has not adequately recognized this danger.

We must not allow a second 1933 to happen, and there certainly needs to be a big clarification even inside the unions, as to what danger the Greens mean for us. I would not go so far as to say that they are blind. I believe actually that there are some people who already see the danger, but nobody opens his mouth; that's the tragedy! Then, people said: "We did not know," but today people do know!

EIR: How do you judge the danger of a growing xenophobia, as is being spread through the parties and the media?

Boehnke: I can only speak for my company, where there is absolutely nothing like anti-foreigner feelings. We cooperate well with our foreign co-workers, we have Italians and Turks in my firm, and I cannot see any xenophobia there whatsoever. I do not think that the ordinary man in the street tends to be anti-foreigner; at least in the council I have not detected it. On the other hand, German industry called these people here, but the German government has been quite neglectful. It has neglected to integrate these foreign workers!

EIR: One more question, on the latest austerity measures which were passed during the last session of the Bundestag [parliament].

Boehnke: I think that this cannot go any further. I accuse the government of taking the path of least resistance and making the socially weakest ones pay the bill, and in contrast the government massively exempts businessmen with the argument that they have to invest to create more jobs. I can tell you that, on the contrary, what investment is being made is eliminating jobs all the time. When a firm invests today it only invests to cut back workers and not to create new jobs. At least in my company it's that way.

EIR: That brings us back to the point that things can only pick up when more is produced than is required for local needs.

Boehnke: That's exactly right: Our industry was built upon exports, and when we no longer export, then our industry sooner or later will die. Then we have what some circles perhaps want, namely the delayed Morgenthau Plan, or the Green Sheep Meadow in the Federal Republic.