

The Stinnes-Legien Agreement (November 15, 1918)

Abstract

During the First World War, the trade unions had become the largest mass organization in Germany, which significantly strengthened their negotiating position. The outbreak of the November Revolution in 1918 fueled fears among German entrepreneurs that the demands of the political left for the socialization of the means of production could prevail. To avert this, the entrepreneurs and the trade unions concluded an agreement on November 15, 1918, that met several of the trade unions' key demands. It was named after the negotiators Hugo Stinnes, who at the time was one of the most powerful coal and steel magnates in Germany and represented the employers, and Carl Legien, the president of the International Trade Union Confederation and a long-standing member of the Reichstag for the Social Democratic Party. The agreement included the introduction of the eight-hour work day at full pay, the formation of workers' committees, and the recognition of the trade unions as legitimate representatives of the workers and equal partners in collective bargaining. In addition, all workers returning from military service were granted the right to return to their former jobs. In return, the unions distanced themselves from demands for socialization along Soviet lines and instead assumed a role in the free enterprise economy. However, the Central Working Group (ZAG), which was set up by the agreement and had equal representation, only lasted until 1924, when disputes arose over working hours.

Source

The major employers' associations and the trade unions agree on the following points:

1. The trade unions will be recognized as the elected representatives of the workforce.
2. There can be no restriction on the freedom of workers, either male or female, to unionize.
3. The employers and the employers' associations will terminate all direct and indirect support for company unions (the so called economically-friendly unions).
4. All workers returning from military service have the right to immediate reinstatement to the job they had before the war. The employer' associations and the trade unions will cooperate in obtaining the raw materials and work orders needed to fully honor this pledge.
5. Joint supervision and control of the employment records.
6. Working conditions for all male and female workers will be regulated in each trade through collective agreements with the relevant workers' unions. Negotiations on this are to begin immediately and be concluded promptly.
7. Every factory with a labor force of at least 50 will elect a workers' committee to represent the labor force and to work with the factory owner to ensure that factory conditions correspond with the collective agreement.
8. Collective agreements are to create arbitration boards made up of an equal number of representatives of employers and workers.
9. The maximum length of the work day in all industries is set at 8 hours. No reduction in earnings may

result from this reduction in work hours.

10. A central committee made up of an equal number of representatives of employers and workers from each trade will implement this agreement. It will also adopt further measures that may prove necessary for supervising the demobilization, maintaining economic life, and guaranteeing the living standard of workers, especially those wounded in the war.

11. This central committee will also be responsible for deciding on fundamental questions concerning the collective regulation of wage levels and working conditions, and it will arbitrate labor disputes that affect several industries at once. Its decisions will be binding on both employers and workers, provided that they are not challenged, within one week's time, by any of the professional associations concerned.

12. These agreements take effect on the day of their signing and, unless they are replaced by another law, will remain in effect with a three-month cancellation period until further notice.

This agreement is to govern the relationship between employers' associations and unions of white collar employees as well.

Berlin, November 15, 1918.

Union of German Employers' Associations

Association of German Metal Industrialists

Employers' Association for the Northwestern Regional Group of the Association of German Iron and Steel Industrialists

Coal Mining Federation

Association of German Railcar Manufacturers

Employers' Association of the German Textile Industry

Berlin Chemical Industry Employers' Association

Employers' Association of the German Paper, Pulp, Cellulose, and Wood Products Industry

National Association of the German Piano Industry and Allied Trades

Employers' Alliance for the German Building Trade

Employers' Protective Association for German Locksmiths and Allied Trades

Alliance of Berlin Employers' Associations

Central Federation of German Employers in the Transport, Trade, and Transportation Industries

Protective Association of German Lithographers

Upper Silesian Mining and Ironworks Association, Kattowitz

Association of German Iron and Steel Industrialists, Main Executive Board, Berlin

Association of German Iron and Steel Industrialists, Eastern Group, Kattowitz

Central Federation of the German Electro-technical Industry

Employers' Protective Association for the German Wood Industry

Employers' Federation for the Pipe-Fitting Trade

General German Employers' Protective Federation for the Baking Trade

General Commission of German Unions

General Federation of German Christian Unions

Federation of German Craftworkers' Unions

Polish Trade Union

Association of Business Federations

Association of Independent Clerical Workers

Association of Technical Federations

Dr. Sorge, Hilger, Hugo Stinnes, Vögler, Beukenberg, Hugenberg, Springorum, von Raumer, von Rieppel, Dietrich, Paul Westermayer, Dr. Tänzler, Avellis, Schrey, Lammers, Paul Mangers, Dr. Emil Franke, Karl Friedrich von Siemens, Rathenau, Ernst von Borsig, Albert Müller, Ernst Purschian, Deutsch, C. Legien, A. Stegerwald, Gustav Hartmann, Hugo Sommer, Dr. Pfirrmann, Dr. Höfle.

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