



## Striking whilst the iron is hot!

By **Lisa Rix** - 31 January 2018

IG Metall, the German trade union which represents 3.9 million workers in the metal and engineering industry, has called for all-day strikes after union leaders and employers in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg failed to reach agreement in 16 hours of talks overnight on Friday. Baden-Württemberg is home to companies such as Porsche and Mercedes-Benz maker Daimler.

IG Metall is demanding that employers give workers a 6% pay rise and the right to temporarily reduce their weekly hours from 35 to 28 to care for their children, or elderly or sick relatives, with the ability to return to full time employment after two years as well as extra money to offset lost wages during the period of reduced hours. This right to reduce working time at the cost of the employer is the main sticking point for the union. The union has said that it has also offered concessions to employers in the latest round of talks, proposing a flexible model allowing workers to choose between extra money and time off to care for their children, or elderly or sick relatives. Any deal agreed in Baden-Württemberg would typically be applied in other German states as well.

This is the first push for shorter hours since workers staged seven weeks of strikes in the 1980s to reduce the working week from 40 hours to 35 hours. IG Metall has chosen now to push for these changes due to economic growth being at its fastest in Germany in six years and unemployment being at a record low.

Over the last few weeks, workers have been conducting many one hour “cautioning” strikes, a common strategy in sectoral wage settlements in Germany. Some of the companies affected by these include Siemens, BMW, Volkswagen, BMW and Bosch.

This may be an extreme example but the drive towards flexible working and a better work/life balance is something most employers will be familiar with. Fortunately, employers in the UK generally have more control over how flexible working measures are implemented in their organisations and due to the UK landscape are unlikely to face such a powerful challenge from unions.