Sacked Schlecker worker denounces trade union's callousness

23 April 2012

We are publishing on a regular basis letters and contributions from Schlecker employees who have made contact with the *World Socialist Web Site*. In doing so, our aim is to provide a forum for the employees to discuss the company's management, the insolvency administration and the trade union, and simultaneously make the Schlecker staff's experiences accessible to workers all over the world.

We call on all Schlecker employees to contribute to the forum by emailing our editors at wsws@gleichheit.de. In addition, we seek to help to establish defensive structures in the form of action committees that are free from the control of the Verdi trade union. These action committees will enable workers to share their experiences, discuss the political context and prepare their own industrial action.

In order to protect employees against dismissal and victimisation, we will be publishing these contributions anonymously. Today we publish a contribution from a staff member, once a works council representative, who now comments on the anti-social policies of the Verdi union.

* * *

Back then, when the first works council elections were held, I consented to stand. I just wanted to help colleagues who didn't know how to help themselves, and have the chance to inform the company of any violations it was making. Knowing what I do today, I was certainly naive back then! At the time, I had no idea that everything would get out of hand due to those works council elections. I soon realised that members of the works council were fighting mainly for their own interests. I was astounded by the kind of issues they wanted to deal with.

It was all too corrupt for me. The really important things were ignored. I suggested doing something about the firm's imposition on the staff of certain cleaning tasks, because that's not part of the job description for workers in sales administration or in the actual selling or check-out jobs. Not interested! Ergonomic seats in the works council office were said to be more important.

This went on for four years. I didn't want to be a works council member any more. My conscience told me I was better off without the works council. They went after problems where there were none, and ignored the real ones.

My Verdi regional officer even had a hand in the last works council elections at Schlecker. She advised employees, who faced being sacked but were also her "favourites", to make themselves available for special protection against dismissal.

We all knew by then that a number of store closures were in the cards and there would be redundancies. I thought that I was safe, having worked for the company for 18 years and as manager of a store with a high turnover. Just the same, I joined up with Verdi because of the social security contract. I'd never thought much of Verdi. The company hadn't always played fair with me. But I'd rarely been treated as callously as I was by the central works council, Verdi and the insolvency administrator, when I received my dismissal notice in the letterbox and when I first had to learn about everything from the media.

Shortly before we were given notice, we were invited to a meeting promoting the transfer company.

Numerous speeches were made by Verdi, the state employment office and the function organiser. I asked for the microphone and explained to the 'former' Schlecker employees that the people who prepared the sackings lists were the same people who arranged the redundancy agreements, and that they had no interest in representing us. I wanted to make my colleagues wake up, and told them that Verdi, the central works council and the company liquidator had sold us out.

According to a representative of the receivership, Schlecker employed some 1,200 works council members, almost all of whom would have had to go in the course of a normal downsizing, and the company sacked

© World Socialist Web Site

longstanding employees as well as handicapped members of staff. As far as I can see it, no proper redundancy process took place. For example, a list was made of all the outlet administrations in each works council region. In my region, there were 21 women on that list. After closure of all the selected outlets, five women were still needed. So only 16 redundancies had to be announced. But 7 of the 21 were on the works council. So the other 14 were given the sack. I should have been fourth on the list, because of my age and years served at the company. But no, I was made redundant.

The entire agreement about the transfer company was a farce, and the central works council and Verdi refused to publish a full account of the negotiations. We were asked to renounce all legal claims against Schlecker in order to receive 80 percent of our salary for six months longer while we were unemployed. This was all tied up with short-term employment allowances based on income tax contributions; but no one told us that. Following dismissal, our earnings over the previous 12 months would be calculated to determine the rates of the unemployment benefit we would receive.

I told everyone to go to a lawyer and have the contract legally examined. Everyone was enthusiastic about what I said. Still, almost all signed the contract. I was glad the transfer company didn't materialise. People would have fallen into a trap.

Thank you Verdi—I'm being ironic—for advising us not to file suits. What a bunch of swindlers! But it was you who always spurred us on to act in our own defence. And now your people are telling us it's better that all should end peacefully. Hardly ever have I come across such turncoats. Who needs them! Any decent legal insurance policy is cheaper and better. And, at least so far, no labour law attorney has tried to bamboozle me.

A Schlecker employee

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site