

Letter from a worker at the Schlecker German drugstore chain: “We cannot accept the wage cut”

20 April 2012

Following a declaration of bankruptcy earlier this year, German drugstore chain Schlecker announced the sacking of 11,000 workers. Just one week ago the company declared that the remaining 13,500 staff must accept a 15 percent wage cut. The workers trade union, Verdi (United Services Union), has played a key role in implementing these attacks and has done everything in its power to prevent workers from asserting their legitimate rights.

In its reports on the sackings the WSWs has called for the building of action committees in opposition to Verdi in order to provide a forum for workers to share their experiences, discuss the political context of the attacks being carried out, and prepare their own industrial action. We invited Schlecker employees to contact the web site. A number of workers have done so and below we reproduce one of these letters.

In order to protect against dismissal and repression, the name of this worker has been withheld. She has worked for the company for more than 15 years.

We cannot accept the wage cut of 15 percent, plus slashing of holiday and Christmas bonuses. We are expected to maintain the same productivity, often more is demanded of us and we face high travel costs to reach the stores where we work.

I have worked for the firm of Anton Schlecker for over 15 years. I was originally employed for a 38-hour week, but due to the cuts I am currently working just 18 hours. Even overtime is not paid according to the full hourly rate. Due to the changes to the early and late shifts it is not possible to take on another job and I had

to accept the company offer of €7 [US\$9.16] per hour for overtime work. The regular hourly rate is currently €9.10 [US\$11.91] per hour.

The company has already implemented enough cuts. For the last eight years I worked in a small store in a village (involving long commutes to work). I knew the customers by name and we spoke about their problems and worries. They were good customers and we were always able to meet the sales targets.

About three years ago, however, the range of goods was drastically reduced. Then came price increases and supply problems for many items. Our customers became dissatisfied and our revenue soon declined. We did our best, but had to watch helplessly and get used to the idea that the shop would close. In June of last year the point had been reached. We cleaned out the store and said goodbye to our customers. Our temporary employees were terminated at the end of the year.

After consultation with our district manager, a colleague and I travelled almost 50 kilometers to the next branch with the job of preparing its closure. The women at this branch had already had their contracts terminated, and had to witness a new store opening in the same street with new labour contracts. It was a very unpleasant situation for us all.

Then I was relocated to a new store almost 20 kilometers away, with a new climate, new colleagues and customers. It was a fine store with good sales, and after two months I gladly went back to work. But the nasty surprise came in November and December. Deliveries of the ordered goods once again declined and we were informed that the company had financial problems. There was no business during the Christmas of 2011. Every day we waited for information in order to explain the situation to our customers.

I had expected the news of the bankruptcy, but was shocked to learn that my own shop, with its large numbers of customers and strong sales, was on the closure list. We then received invitations to attend a meeting of the transfer company and so began the dismissal of many cherished and longstanding colleagues.

I was able to retain my job, but that brought little relief. One was so powerless and the future remains completely uncertain. But there was no time to think. In the meantime, I have been transferred to another store about 30 kilometers away. Business is good and my co-workers are also very nice. We will have to see how things proceed, but we cannot afford to make any more concessions.

There are many indications that A. Schlecker and his family have planned the bankruptcy and have made sure their own wealth is tucked away. The purpose of the transfer company is merely to avoid lawsuits and severance payments. They do not lose any sleep about their employees, who have laboured for the company for years. A 15 percent wage cut and slashing of holiday and Christmas bonuses must be prevented.

A Schlecker employee



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