

# Schlecker drug store worker: “It is like organizing one’s own funeral”

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The liquidation of the Schlecker drug store chain began last week following the decision by creditors to wind up the company. A number of outlets have already been closed and the remaining sites are selling off their stock of goods at discounts of 30 to 50 percent.



“I can hardly believe what I am seeing,” was the comment by Miriam W., 37, who has worked on the till in a Schlecker store in Berlin for nearly 20 years. As she placed yet another palette of products on the shelves she told this reporter, “You work away for years, you do your bit to help up build something—and then this.”

Lyudmila V., 33, has worked for the drugstore chain for eight years. She looked around at the largely emptied shelves and stated: “First it made me angry that we were held back from doing anything for so long and not informed about what was going on. Now it makes me almost physically sick that we have to help wind down the stores. It is like organizing one’s own funeral.”

In fact, the proceeds of the sell-off will go in the first place to the multi-billion-dollar wealthy creditors of the company. It is highly unlikely that any money will be left for severance payments for the sacked workers and it is even unclear whether workers will receive full wages for the work they are currently carrying out.

Marina, 48, the mother of two grown children, is

seeking to come to grips with her new situation. “This sale is just as demeaning as the whole way they have treated us,” she said. “Sometimes I have the feeling we are just not worth anything.”

In addition to the feelings of humiliation due to the way they have been treated, the shop workers also confront a completely uncertain future. “Last night I lost my temper and yelled at a customer who had rammed a shelf with her shopping trolley,” she said. “When she then told me she had four children herself and could hardly make ends meet I felt really sorry for her. Somehow we all seem to be stuck in a hopeless situation.”

“It’s the elderly workers who get the most sympathy,” said Vera, who will soon reach retirement age. “But in my eyes, the young women are no better off. How can they ever acquire a decent pension when they move from one cheap wage job to another the whole time?”

The biggest concern of the women who have been sacked by Schlecker is finding a new job. “Finding a well-paid full-time job today is like winning the lottery,” Miriam said. “Most of us will have to settle for part-time positions. Out of desperation some will undoubtedly end up working for temporary agencies, just to avoid unemployment and the miserable Hartz IV welfare payments.”

“That’s right,” her colleague responded. “We all know full well: once you end up with Hartz IV, you can never get back on your feet!”

Many of the Schlecker women are reluctant to talk about their experiences of the past few weeks—their disappointment is too great. They are all equally angry, however, at the proposal made by the German minister of labour and social affairs, Ursula von der Leyen, who advised them to retrain as teachers. “The proposal is a

total insult! It is just an attempt by this careerist to polish up her image,” Ludmilla said. “In reality, she couldn’t care less about what happens to us,” a fellow employee added.

“She has no idea of our problems anyway,” added the daughter of an employee who had come to deposit her school bag with her mother. “She should come to our family and sit down with Mom and us children at the kitchen table instead of making big speeches on television and watching the world from the back of her limousine.”

Workers are especially angry with the Verdi trade union, which has systematically deceived employees during the past few months and helped organize the bankruptcy.

“What else could they have done?” asked Vera. She is a cashier in a store in the middle of Berlin that is to be closed in three weeks. Her resigned shrug was immediately countered by an angry fellow worker.

“The union is so double-dealing,” her colleague declared. “When layoffs in February took place, they protected their own people wherever they could. It was often older colleagues who were not members of the union who were sacked—although it is almost impossible for them to find a new job.”

“The mess we are in shows what Verdi has achieved: nothing at all,” concluded another worker. “Without them we would have probably achieved more. Then we would have been forced to do something ourselves.”

“I get really angry when I think of the Verdi people,” said a third colleague. “They have done basically nothing for us. Now we’re out on the street, but they still have their posts and privileges!” In disgust she pulled an empty plastic cover from her purse. “Do you know what used to be in there?” she asked. “My Verdi membership card. I won’t need that in future!”



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