

# Teachers demonstrate in Berlin

**Our correspondent**  
**20 February 2013**

About 3,000 teachers and day-care workers stopped work on Monday and demonstrated through the centre of Berlin. The protest was organized following the collapse of the second round of state contract negotiations for public sector workers taking place in Potsdam.

The talks, involving the service trade unions Verdi, the police trade union, the teachers union GEW, the Civil Service Association, and the German Federation of Civil Servants (DBB), broke up last Thursday without a result and are scheduled to resume on March 7- 8.

Teachers in Berlin are demanding a 6.5 percent wage increase and the reintroduction of their holiday scheme, which had been terminated by the employers' side. The main demand of the teachers, however, is "equal pay for equal work". Their anger is directed in particular against the previous city coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party, which introduced a two-tier pay system for teachers before being ousted from office in 2011.

Teachers in Berlin have been denied the status of civil servants since 2004. The 8,000 teachers employed since 2004 earn an average of just €30,600 (US\$41,000) per year. A teacher with civil service status, on the other hand, earns €33,300, which adds up to a difference of over €100,000 during 40 years in the profession, and also leads to correspondingly lower pensions.

The scheme has already led to an acute shortage of teachers. In the most recent round of recruitment for the coming school year only 184 teachers have been found for 294 vacant posts. An additional grievance is that tenured teachers who move to Berlin retain their status—a measure that also goes back to the SPD-Left Party city Senate and makes clear what both parties think of "equal pay for equal work".

In January, the finance minister for the state of Saxony-Anhalt, Jens Bullerjahn (SPD), who represents

the contract association of German states (TdL), brought about the collapse of the first round of talks, precipitating strikes in Berlin by about one thousand teachers from 50 schools. This time, teachers and day-care employees from more than 150 schools and institutions participated in the latest strike, and more than 3,000 took part in the demonstration.

"You can sense the growing anger among colleagues", said Marco, a young teacher, who pointed out that contract bargaining in 2011 had led to no progress regarding the classification of teachers. "It concerns about 200,000 teachers employed throughout Germany, who are due to be classified as part of the current contract talks. We were promised improvements at the end of the last round of contract bargaining, but nothing has been done."

Two young colleagues underlined his argument: "We increasingly get the feeling that we must become active ourselves", one said, and immediately received support from bystanders. A teacher commented: "When you do not get personally involved, then you will be cheater. Then at the end of it all there are a few nice words—and everything remains the same."

Marion, a 26-year teacher in a day-care center, was angry with the Verdi trade union: "Most of my colleagues are not here today because they are members of Verdi. And Verdi advised them not to strike!"

In fact, the Verdi spokesman for Berlin, Andreas Splanemann, had called for a boycott of the strike last weekend. Splanemann argued he did not want to jeopardise the current negotiations with the employers, because "the negotiation situation is unfavourable if one side is already mobilized to strike."

Criticism was also made of the GEW teachers union, which did support the latest strike in Berlin. "Instead of also taking to the streets today and broadening our action the GEW in [the neighbouring state of] Brandenburg is doing nothing," declared a retired

teacher who had travelled from Eberswalde. “The union does all it can to keep the SPD-Left Party state administration in Brandenburg out of the firing line. They are all in it together.”

The chairman of the GEW in the state of Brandenburg, Günter Fuchs, has announced that “selective action” will take place in the state this week, leading up to a demonstration of teachers plus a mass meeting on March 6.

Selective strikes are planned in all 16 German states in the coming days and weeks, and once again the main aim of the union is to defuse anger and prevent united action.

Strikes are planned on Tuesday in the states of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg and next week teachers in North Rhine-Westphalia will stop work. The focus of the protests is the first week of March, when negotiations are due to recommence between unions and the TdL.



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