

Deutsche Post workers continue strike

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Postal workers in Germany have been involved in a periodic and limited strike over the last month to oppose a 20 percent pay cut that Deutsche Post DHL is seeking through outsourcing parcel delivery to a low-cost subsidiary.

The newly formed Delivery GmbH with 49 regional branches is set to take over package deliveries from the partially state-owned postal company. The new company already has a contract with the ver.di trade union for freight and logistical workers, which pays twenty percent less than the rate paid to Deutsche Post DHL workers.

Under the threat of not having their temporary contracts renewed, approximately 4,000 former DP employees have accepted new employment contracts with Delivery GmbH since January. These include the 20 percent wage cut. Over the next few years, up to 10,000 delivery workers are expected to be hired by Delivery GmbH because of the rapid increase in online orders.

Since first being floated on the stock market in 2000, Deutsche Post DHL, which is still 21 percent state-owned, has pursued a global expansion strategy at the expense of workers in Germany and the rest of the world. Abandoning its original purpose of providing public service it focuses exclusively on profit maximization and has become the largest logistics company in the world. In the United States, it operates as DHL Express, a major competitor of United Parcel Service, FedEx and the US Postal Service.

The head of Deutsche Post, Frank Appel, cynically pointed out that the employees of Delivery GmbH are given long-term contracts and therefore have more job security than those who previously had temporary contracts. "We do not understand why ver.di is opposed to 6,000 permanent jobs paid according to contracts agreed by ver.di, which are still 50 percent higher than the wages of our competitors," he said.

The current average wage of postal employees is around 17 to 18 euros per hour, while Delivery GmbH pays an average of about 13 euros. Rival companies usually employ subcontractors, where the hourly wage mirrors the official minimum wage, i.e., about 8.50 euros.

Postal workers have demonstrated they are ready to fight. Nevertheless, their union ver.di has refused to organize an all-out strike of the more than 100,000 employees. Up until early June, the union had limited all actions to regional strikes with minimal impact.

Following the sixth round of negotiations ver.di proposed to replace regular salary increases over the term of a 27-month contract with a one-off payment of 500 euros. In exchange, the union is demanding that the new delivery companies agree to the existing DP contract. The DP executive has made no response to the proposal and has allowed its deadline to reply to elapse.

Under pressure from workers, ver.di was forced to declare an indefinite strike, which began at the start of this week. At the same time the union limited the strike to selective actions, thereby encouraging the DP management to undertake a renewed offensive.

At the end of last week board member Jürgen Gerdes categorically rejected the union's demand. He arrogantly explained that the month of strikes has had little effect, claiming the DP can manage the high volume of over 60 million pieces of daily mail and parcel deliveries with only small delays.

Only some 10 percent of deliveries are affected because DP has assigned key jobs in letter distribution centers to postal workers from Poland and 40,000 civil servants who are barred from striking by law. On 26 May the Bonn District Court dismissed an appeal lodged by ver.di against the use of managers as strikebreakers.



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