

Ver.di seeks to impose sellout of German childcare workers strike

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On Wednesday evening an assembly of delegates representing striking childcare workers decisively rejected a deal advocated by their union leadership. Now the head of the Verdi public service union, Frank Bsirske, is attempting to enforce the arbitration proposal despite overwhelming opposition from union members.

The Verdi executive has approved a so-called “membership survey” to be carried out over a period of four weeks. New negotiations with the employers’ side are scheduled for August 13, and all strike action is suspended up to that date.

Bsirske announced the plan at a press conference on Thursday. The initiative is aimed at providing time for the union executive to dissipate and undermine the militancy of the affected childcare personnel and social workers. Meetings are to be held at a local level, at which union officials will explain why there is no alternative to the arbitration result.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on a “discussion meeting” that took place on Thursday in Munich, a focal point of the strike in recent weeks. Heinrich Birner, the responsible Verdi official for the Munich district, told the *Süddeutsche*: “We want to clarify how much risk workers are willing to take. If the arbitration award is rejected negotiations will start over again.” Employees could end up with an even lower wage increase than the one currently on offer, Birner declared.

Heinrich Birner is a typical Verdi bureaucrat. He is a long-time Social Democratic Party (SPD) functionary, a member of several company boards and has had close relations with local employers for many years.

The four-week survey of members and the “discussion meetings” are being used to strangle the strike before the summer holiday break and enforce an

arbitration result that many strikers rightly regarded as a provocation.

The proposal of the mediator, to increase income between zero and 4.5 percent, is in fact a cut in real wages. Based on the proposed five-year period this would amount to a less than 1 percent wage increase, below the current level of inflation.

In addition, employees in social and childcare are to be punished with a five-year ban on any industrial action.

The Verdi leadership is determined to impose this binding contract and enforce it against its membership. To this end the bureaucrats are prepared to use all sorts of tricks, maneuvers and threats.

At the delegates meeting in Frankfurt, Bsirske threatened that a continuation of the strike would end in defeat. Whoever refuses a deal now would lose everything later and leave a legacy of “scorched earth” and “dysfunctional relations”, he said. “We can refuse, of course,” Bsirske said, “but this is what the employers are waiting for.” They are ready and able to sit out the strike and defeat the strikers.

Bsirske and the Verdi leadership faithfully regurgitate the outlook of employers and their lackeys in the bourgeois media. Accordingly, no responsibility is to be assigned to the government and political parties that deregulate public services in the interest of the banks and corporations, resulting in “dysfunctional relations”, crowded day care centres, rundown schools, hospitals and retirement homes, closed libraries and swimming pools. Instead it is child carers and social workers fighting for better working conditions who are accused of leaving behind a “scorched earth”.

The German government has spent billions for the bank bailout and is providing further billions for weapons systems and the upgrading of the German

army. German Joachim President Gauck, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier all advocate “global engagement”, i.e., participation in international wars. The issue is: who here is preparing for a “scorched earth”?

The current foreign policy course in Germany is fully supported by the trade unions. On a web site of the Foreign Ministry (“Review 2014”) German trade union federation (DGB) head Reiner Hoffmann welcomed the government’s shift towards “preventive intervention” in foreign policy.

Hoffman’s predecessor, Michael Sommer, invited defence minister Thomas de Maizi re to the DGB headquarters and expressly agreed with him when de Maizi re described the Bundeswehr as “part of the peace movement”. Four years ago Frank Bsirske even supported tours promoting the Bundeswehr among young people, saying: “It is a matter of course for Verdi to promote recruitment into the armed forces.”

Under conditions where the government is preparing for war, Verdi is using the arbitration award to impose a pay freeze and a five-year no-strike agreement on employees in social and educational services. Verdi has complained in mantra-like fashion about the “intransigence” and “tough stance” of the employers. This is also farcical.

The trade unions are intimately linked to the political parties to which the municipal employers are affiliated. Bsirske knows the arbitration head Herbert Schmalstieg well and is on friendly terms with him. In Hanover, Bsirske worked as head of department staff under the then-Mayor Schmalstieg and slashed almost a thousand jobs in the civil service. The employers are variously affiliated to the Green, SPD and Left Party politicians who have carried out massive social cutbacks at a local level for many years.

Many workers who had placed great hopes in the strike in recent weeks are incensed and angry about the behaviour of Verdi. “After the abysmal Verdi policy in the labour dispute”, writes one carer online, “75% of all the members must expressly say no. All those votes not cast are regarded by the officials as consent. Previously this was always the way the outcome of negotiations is ‘determined’ and the strike stalled.” The whole thing was “a disaster for all concerned”.

The latest betrayal by the Verdi leadership fully

confirms the warnings issued by the *World Socialist Web Site* as the strike started four weeks ago: “The striking carers and social workers are highly motivated. But they face a major problem: if their struggle remains under the control of the trade unions, its failure is guaranteed.”



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