German Ver.di trade union sells out postal workers strike

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9 July 2015

After a four-week strike and a high degree of militancy by German postal workers, the Ver.di trade union has accepted a contract that is directly opposed to the interests of the workers and enforces the dictates of their employer, Deutsche Post.

The newly formed regional DHL Delivery companies will continue to exist, along with their extremely low wages. The minimal pay increases included in the contract amount to a pay freeze when inflation is taken into account, and the demand for two-and-a-half hours' less work per week was abandoned entirely.

The demand for fewer working hours per week was totally abandoned. It will remain at 38.5 hours with increased speed-up.

With incredible cynicism, Ver.di lead negotiator and the union's deputy chairwoman Andrea Kocsis stated on Sunday evening at the conclusion of talks in Bad Neuenahr, "We are very satisfied with the agreement." She was speaking for herself and a well-paid layer of trade union bureaucrats, and for her colleagues on the board of Deutsche Post, where she holds the post of deputy chairwoman.

She was also speaking for the shareholders. This was demonstrated on Monday morning when Post AG shares jumped by 4 percent two hours after the opening of the stock market, even as the Dax fell due to the Greek crisis.

Jochen Rothenbacher, an analyst at Equinet Bank in Frankfurt, stated to *Handelsblatt*, "This agreement is very positive, because Deutsche Post has secured its main demand with the new companies."

"We are extremely angry, all of us!" was the response from a female postal worker in Berlin to the WSWS, expressing the widespread sentiments of anger and hostility among employees. She has worked for the postal service for 15 years and delivers letters in a number of delivery districts.

"Our colleagues didn't have to strike for weeks for this," she stated. "What is a pay increase of a few percent worth? €400 for the entire year until October 1, 2016, and then a meagre 2 percent for another year, and then another 1.7 percent from October 1, 2017? And all of this, because we letter delivery workers were promised that we would not be outsourced to DHL Delivery with 20 percent lower wages like the parcel delivery workers until the end of 2018. And after that? What are three years, they will be over in no time. And then the trade union will abandon us, just like parcel delivery workers now."

Deutsche Post founded 49 new companies at the beginning of the year under the DHL Delivery GmbH name, where contracts correspond to the freight and logistics branch and wages are 20 percent lower than the contract at Deutsche Post. To date, 6,500 parcel delivery workers have been employed there, two thirds of whom were previously employed by the main company on temporary contracts. The company held a gun to these workers' heads, offering further employment only with DHL Delivery; otherwise their contracts would have been allowed to expire.

"The alternative was take it or die," a delivery worker told the WSWS. "Today, the postal service is also working with subcontractors, since letter delivery workers can only manage three sacks of mail with our bicycles. When they are empty, we have to get the next load from the grey distribution boxes, which are found here in Berlin at various locations. And these boxes are filled by subcontractors, which collect the post from the distribution centres and take it to the different districts. They are already paid low wages. Why should I be in a trade union, when they portray such a result as a victory?"

A young parcel delivery worker with DHL Delivery, who has only worked there for three weeks, said that he receives just over €10 per hour. He was barely willing to stop, because he had to deliver his large load and could not afford to take a break. He had placed great hopes in

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the strike and was very disappointed by the result. “What should I do now? I have to work and make sure that I cope during the trial period.”

Deutsche Post management is exploiting the desperation of many precariously employed workers and has no difficulty in filling the new positions at DHL Delivery. An expansion of employees from the current 6,500 to 20,000 by 2020 was “very realistic,” stated Deutsche Post head of human resources Melanie Kreis.

The reasons for the strong growth are due to a significant rise in online shopping and Deutsche Post’s expansion plans. The firm has set a goal of becoming the world’s largest logistics firm by securing new markets. It therefore intends to reduce the wages of employees to the level of the subcontractors whom its competitors employ.

Deutsche Post management intervened with extreme ruthlessness against the strike. Managers were used as strikebreakers. Private individuals and relatives of managers were called upon at short notice to deliver parcels on Sunday, a breach of the ban on Sunday work that was accepted during the strike in many German states. At the same time, workers on temporary contracts were put under pressure by being offered continued employment only if they did not join the strike.

At no point did Ver.di prepare to combat this hardline approach by management and mobilise the full strength of the 140,000 workers. From the outset, the strike was restricted to a few areas.

Ver.di signaled during seven rounds of bargaining that it was willing to compromise, thereby strengthening the aggressive actions of management. The claim that nothing more could have been achieved is false. In reality, Ver.di systematically sabotaged the fighting spirit of the workers and restricted action because it accepted the business concept of increasing competitiveness.

This is why Ver.di is now trying to talk up the result. Deputy Chairwoman Kocsis spoke on Sunday immediately after the conclusion of talks of a “fair compromise.” But all attempts to present the result as a victory is a blatant lie. The outsourcing of letter and parcel delivery from the same delivery company in rural areas was excluded until the end of 2018. This means nothing more than that these sections will be eliminated thereafter, with letter deliverers accepting a major wage cut like the parcel deliverers.

Only trainees from 2015 will receive permanent full-time contracts. This means that with a three-year contract, this will be the last year and that in the future, not all trainees will be taken on full time.

The current parcel delivery workers at Deutsche Post, some 7,650 workers, were permanently secured and will remain as employees. Meanwhile, those parcel delivery workers currently employed by DHL Delivery have no such job security. In other words, Ver.di has agreed to the splitting of the workforce, a division that will be used to blackmail workers in the future.

A guarantee against any compulsory redundancies and layoffs was negotiated for employees until the end of 2019. This is an empty promise given the division of the workforce, and the numerous options for the company to force workers out of their job. A significant increase in workloads is only one of these.

The WSWS warned during the strike, “It is becoming ever clearer that postal workers can only successfully carry out a struggle against wage dumping not with, but rather against Ver.di and its corrupt policy of social partnership.”

The miserable sell-out agreement with which Ver.di has condemned postal workers to three years of low wages and speed-up is directly connected with the other contracts concluded over recent weeks. These include the calling off of the child care workers’ strike and the strike by Post Bank workers, and the lack of a result for the strike at the Berlin Charité, to mention only the most recent betrayals, as well as the five-year strike ban concluded by the train drivers’ union with Deutsche Bahn management.

It is significant that Ver.di called off the postal workers’ strike last Sunday, at the same time as the vote in the referendum in Greece against the EU’s brutal austerity measures took place. Ver.di and other trade unions support the German government’s policy in Greece, which has resulted in the ruination of an entire country. They are desperately seeking to prevent a struggle by the working class in Germany that could strike an alliance with workers and youth in Greece.

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