

Appeal by Berlin Senate candidate Andy Niklaus: Workers need their own party!

Andy Niklaus
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Andy Niklaus has worked for the Berlin Transport Company (BVG) for 25 years and is running as a candidate of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) in the elections for the Berlin Senate to be held September 18. He has issued the following appeal.

Dear colleagues,

I have worked for 25 years in the Berlin Transport Company (BVG) and I am running as a candidate of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) in the elections for the Berlin House of Representatives to be held on September 18.

I call on my fellow workers at the BVG and all other companies to read the election program of the PSG and build a workplace committee of the PSG.

The Berlin elections are taking place in a period of extraordinary crisis. While all of the established parties act as though peace, joy and sunshine prevail, the world resembles a powder keg. All of the ghosts of the past are back again: economic crisis, mass poverty, dictatorship and the drive to war.

When the German government announced during the last week of August that the population must prepare itself for attacks from chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, many people could not believe their ears.

But the instructions to stockpile food and water and maintain a supply of medication, warm blankets, flashlights, loaded batteries and reserves of cash—as well as the plans for the reintroduction of compulsory military service and the announcement that the Federal Labour Office is authorized to conscript men and women to work in “areas vital to the nation’s defence” in the event of war—must be taken seriously.

These directives make clear that a war conspiracy is taking place behind the backs of the population in which all of the established parties are implicated. If the working class does not intervene to stop the drive to war, we will be threatened with a catastrophe even worse than those of

the First and Second World Wars.

But in order to intervene in these social developments, the working class needs its own party which combines the fight against war with the fight against capitalism, poverty and want; a party that fights for an anti-capitalist and socialist program and for the international cooperation and unity of all workers.

That is why I am running as a candidate of the PSG. The PSG represents this program and is part of an international organization, the Fourth International, led by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Building the PSG is also of the utmost importance for the immediate problems confronting workers. All problems in the companies are today posed as political problems. To solve them, one needs a socialist program and an international strategy.

This is clearly demonstrated in the Berlin Transport Company. For years, a systematic social regression has taken place. The wages of BVG workers, like those of other public service workers, are being reduced to an extremely low level. Rising food costs and, above all, the exploding rents in Berlin quickly eat up any savings.

Chiefly responsible are the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party and the Verdi union. During the period when the SPD and the Left Party were in power in Berlin under the leadership of Klaus Wowereit (2001-2011), a veritable low-wage sector was established among local transport workers. The first step in this process took place in 1999 in the Senate controlled by the Christian Democrat Party (CDU) and Berlin mayor Eberhard Diepgen, when the Berlin Transport GmbH was founded with poorly paid personnel. The largest cuts then happened in 2005 under Wowereit.

In 2003, the so-called Red-Red Coalition left the federal employers’ association so that they could lower wages and salaries for public sector workers by 12 percent. Two

years later, this was applied to the BVG.

In the local transport wage agreement TV-N, Verdi made arrangements with the Red-Red Senate not only to drastically cut wages by more than 10 percent and reduce Christmas bonuses and paid vacations. They also organized the division of the workforce into old and new employees with salary differences of up to one third.

That is why I'm an avowed opponent of Verdi.

Verdi does not represent the interests of workers. It is a bureaucratic apparatus with close ties to state institutions. It works closely with the SPD, the Left Party and the Greens. One can see how well integrated into the state apparatus Verdi has become when one examines the leadership of Berlin's Municipal Employers' Association (KAV), which has for years led negotiations for several state and private businesses with Verdi and other trade unions. It is mostly composed of Verdi members.

A good example is the chairman of the KAV-Berlin, Martin Urban, who rose from Verdi predecessor ÖTV, the public service, transport and traffic union, to become head of personnel at the waste disposal company BSR. According to the *Berliner Morgenpost*, as chairman of the KAV, Urban now pockets an annual salary of around €350,000. In the contract negotiations with Berlin's Municipal Employers' Association, Verdi was negotiating with Verdi.

Like all other unions, Verdi sees their main task as the suppression of the class struggle and the stifling of every independent movement of workers the moment they begin. For years, labour agreements have come in the form of adhesion contracts enforcing wage cuts, speed-ups and terrible working conditions.

That is why opposition to Verdi is growing. In the last 10 years, more than 200,000 Verdi members have left the union nationwide. In the BVG, the number of union resignations has also increased.

Because of this, an oppositional Verdi group was formed in the BVG some time ago, describing itself as "Verdi-active—democratic, open, and transparent." They call for a return to "real class-struggle style" and "open democratic" trade union work and seek to transform Verdi into a strong and powerful union.

But it is just as impossible to turn Verdi into a "real class-struggle style" union as it is impossible to turn the SPD once more into a workers party. The SPD is and remains the Hartz-IV and war party and is justly hated. So it is with Verdi. It remains a corrupt, bureaucratic apparatus which has served as a steppingstone into management and high incomes and privileges for many of

its functionaries.

The transformation of Verdi and all other trade unions into agents of management and instruments of the state apparatus is not only a result of widespread corruption of its leading functionaries, but has deep objective roots.

As long as the labour market and working conditions were largely of a national character, the unions could apply pressure to achieve higher wages and social improvements. The globalization of production has created conditions in which unrestricted worldwide competition prevails. Now the unions no longer apply pressure to management to achieve gains for workers. Instead, they gouge the workers for wage and social cuts to improve the conditions of competition for the companies.

That is also why "Verdi-active" raises only the most limited, minimal demands and declares at the beginning of negotiations that it would be satisfied with achieving half of its goals. To be absolutely clear: Anyone who wants only to beg for alms should not be considered a representative of the workers.

In reality, "Verdi-active" is allied with the Left Party and its pseudo-left milieu and is attempting to intercept the growing opposition to Verdi and keep it confined within trade unionist channels.

I reject that. It is necessary to break free from the straitjacket of the union and build a socialist party that stands opposed to the capitalist logic of profit and unites the working class in a struggle against wage and social cuts and the preparations for war. And only on this basis is the consistent enforcement of operational requirements possible.

I therefore call on you: Read the election program of the PSG! Distribute it on Facebook and come to the discussion meetings of the PSG!



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[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)