

Instead of Verdi's fruitless strike calls, workers at Amazon in Germany need independent action committees!

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The strike calls by service union Verdi on Amazon Prime days are as regular as they are useless. Whether it is Easter or Christmas, time and again Verdi calls on workers in a few fulfilment centres to undertake temporary protest strikes. These do nothing to change the extreme levels of exploitation and horrible working conditions and only serve to let workers' growing anger fizzle out in fruitless protests.

The same thing happened on Monday. Verdi called strikes in seven fulfilment centres and staged the familiar protest ritual in front of the gates with whistles and lamentations about Amazon's super-exploitation. It has been like this for years. This ritualised pinprick strike tactic is meant to hide the fact that Verdi is not prepared to wage a serious struggle against the extreme exploitation of the global e-commerce and tech company.

The union is careful not to jeopardise Amazon's business interests in any way. The work stoppages have hardly ever resulted in deliveries being significantly delayed or not arriving at all. Amazon can compensate for the isolated one-day strikes through its extensive European logistics network. The strikes have never prevented Amazon from drastically increasing its profits over the years.

Last year alone, when many employees had to work under gruelling conditions in the face of the pandemic and the lack of protective measures, the US-based multinational drastically increased its profits, seeing the highest profit in the company's history. According to its own figures, Amazon made an annual profit of \$21.3 billion in 2020, compared to \$17.4 billion in 2019 and \$13.2 billion in 2018. Its European business played a big part in this.

In other words, the Verdi strikes have not harmed the company, but they have prevented any real, joint industrial action by Amazon workers across all sites. And this is exactly the message Verdi is trying to get across to the company management.

In all the years that Verdi has been organising protest actions at Amazon, it has never called upon the Amazon

workforce to strike together at all German sites, let alone to take joint action with colleagues in other European and international centres. Across Europe, Amazon has over 60 so-called logistics and fulfilment centres in Germany, Poland, Spain, France, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Worldwide, there are over 800 centres, most of them in the US.

The same terrible conditions prevail in all the fulfilment centres. Verdi claims that the problem is that the management in Germany, as in many other countries, does not recognise the union. Union recognition and the establishment of a works council would improve the situation for the workers, Verdi claims.

This is not true.

Verdi wants to be recognised by the company and form a works council because the union officials are afraid that otherwise, resistance against the brutal methods of exploitation could develop spontaneously, uncontrolled, and explosively and spread to other factories where an "Amazonisation" of production and working conditions is taking place.

One only has to look at other areas of production, services and administration where Verdi is present and exerts strong influence to realise that the union does not act as a representative of the workers' interests but as a regulatory force. Everywhere, with the help of sector collective agreements and company agreements, real wage reductions, social cuts and dismissals are enforced.

For example, Verdi has always served as the house union at Lufthansa. The deputy chairwoman of Verdi, Christine Behle, is also deputy chairwoman of the Lufthansa supervisory board and has been a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) for 27 years. She was largely involved in negotiating the German government's rescue package for Lufthansa, which provides the company with €9 billion of public funds and involves massive job cuts. The number of jobs to be eliminated has been gradually

increased to 60,000.

The works councils compile the redundancy lists and often put pressure on those affected in individual meetings to accept termination. Union shop stewards monitor the departments like company police to nip any serious resistance in the bud.

Verdi also wants to be recognised at Amazon, stressing that the election of a works council is important to create “stable relations.” It understands this to mean the integration of trade unions into the management structures of the corporation, where union officials act as well-paid co-managers. At Amazon, Verdi would not be responsible for improving working conditions but for maintaining peace and order. Their task would not be to abolish super-exploitation but to control the workforce and suppress resistance.

Amazon has so far only refused to recognise the union as a negotiating partner because company boss Jeff Bezos believes he can save the money for paying salaries to full-time works council officials and avoid lengthy negotiations and maintain control over the workers himself. Verdi thinks this is dangerous and warns of a social explosion.

Worldwide, the role of the trade unions has changed. Under the influence of globalised production and the development of multinational corporations, their programme of limited national reforms has turned into a programme of social regression. Together with management, they are intensifying the exploitation of the workforce to strengthen the competitiveness of “their own company” or national location in the global competition.

Trade unions everywhere have become more and more tightly integrated into the structures of the capitalist state over the last decades. The result has been a consistent disaster for the working class and the continued growth of social inequality and poverty.

The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated the reactionary role of the unions. Millions of workers around the world have witnessed how the trade unions have put profit maximisation and personal enrichment above the health and lives of working people.

Unions everywhere have supported the billion-dollar giveaways to the corporations, banks and super-rich. They have maintained production despite the increased risk of infection and covered up the true extent of those infected, seriously ill and dead in factories and offices. And now the unions are playing a key role in pushing through rationalisation programmes, austerity measures and layoffs to squeeze more profit out of the working class.

But workers are showing themselves increasingly confident and willing to fight. Resistance is developing and increasingly takes the form of a rebellion against the unions. The dispute over union recognition at Amazon in the US is

an important lesson in this context.

For a long time, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) tried to gain recognition at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama. In early March, US President Joe Biden lent his support to the campaign and called on Amazon workers in Bessemer to vote for union recognition. When the vote took place in May, an overwhelming majority of workers voted against recognising the union. Despite intensive campaigning and prominent support from politicians and the media, the union failed to win over even 13 percent of the 6,000 workers at the facility.

This was a clear sign that many workers no longer see the trade unions as organisations with which they can defend their interests. What is called a “trade union” today is no longer an organisation of the working class. Union executives enjoy the standard of living of affluent middle class layers and are fully integrated into management and the state apparatus.

Conclusions must be drawn from this transformation of the trade unions. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) calls on workers to build their own action committees at Amazon and its logistics centres, independent of the unions, which are democratic and controlled by the workers themselves. These organisations will network with fellow Amazon workers worldwide and prepare for a common struggle.

Such a mobilisation is not limited to protests, it must combine the struggle against capitalist exploitation with a socialist programme. Corporate giants like Amazon must be expropriated and transformed into public utilities. This is the precondition for establishing democratic control over production and organising society based on social needs.



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