

Food delivery workers in Berlin continue wave of strikes

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Workers at the Gorillas delivery service held a number of strikes last week at several of the company's warehouses in Berlin. They have drawn up a list of demands and indicated that they may continue their job action, which has been provoked by extremely poor working conditions and the confrontational attitude of the company's management.

On 28 June, several dozen riders, as the workers are known, gathered in front of the company location in Berlin's Schönhauser Allee. They published a list of 19 demands, including equal pay for equal work, payment for overtime, better equipment, ventilation systems in all warehouses and bikes more suited to transport deliveries.

A key demand of the riders is the immediate payment of outstanding wages. By the end of the month, several workers were short on their wages, according to the strikers. The reason given by management was that they had lost income due to being ill, but this is a clear violation of the principle of paid sick leave. In some cases, the riders were only paid for the delivery time, as opposed to their actual working hours, which includes wait times and over which they have no influence. The workers rightly characterize this as "wage theft". Workers have given management two weeks to respond to the demands.

Company founder and CEO Ka?an Sümer showed up during the protest and attempted to appease the angry workers, but without success. Sümer was greeted with placards reading, "Get off your bike and pay us!" A spokesperson for the strikers called for an "end to oppression" at the company. Sümer announced that he wanted to visit a total of 40 company sites across Germany starting on 28 June, in order to do a three-hour shift with his employees and answer their questions. A bike ride in Berlin, which Sümer sought to

use to calm the situation down, was cancelled, however, according to media reports.

On 30 June, just two days after one set of the protests, workers at the company branch in the Berlin district of Pankow went on strike. Having been forced to work for four hours in torrential rain with insufficient rain gear, they stopped work at 13.00. As a result, local management had to temporarily halt operations. The strike was suspended in the evening only after a representative promised that the riders would be provided with adequate clothing by the end of the week.

On the same day, about two dozen riders struck in front of the warehouse in Muskauer Straße in Kreuzberg. They also demanded, among other things, waterproof gear.

The jackets and trousers currently provided by the company are completely inadequate, and company spokesperson Tobias Hönig had to admit that what it provides "does not fully protect against getting wet." At the same time, he launched a broadside against the workforce. "We cannot tolerate the fact that this circumstance has been used as the reason for a spontaneous strike without any legal basis and to call for further strikes in other warehouses," he told the Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel*.

One rider told the local TV channel rbb24 that while "rain jackets and rain trousers are available here...they are very dirty." "We don't want to wear them, but we have to," he added. The clothing is also not available in all necessary sizes.

The dangers involved in working without adequate gear were highlighted on July 1 when a rider from Pankow suffered an accident after an ill-fitting rain jacket snagged in her bike. Her injuries were so severe she had to be treated in hospital.

The conflict at the start-up, which attained a company value of one billion dollars in record time and is aiming for a total valuation of six billion dollars, has been simmering for some time and is now assuming ever sharper forms.

Last winter the company failed to provide its riders with warm jackets. Now the company's warehouses lack any air conditioning, endangering those forced to work during the past several weeks when summer temperatures soared. Riders have long complained about back pain due to their heavy bags and problems arising from defective bicycles. In addition, their hours have recently been extended. They are expected to work shifts between 7 a.m. and midnight.

About three weeks ago, the dismissal of one colleague during his probationary period brought the situation at the company to a head. After one rider named Santiago was let go, about a hundred workers assembled in protest. In solidarity, they blocked two company warehouses in Berlin and demanded his reinstatement. The protest was also directed against Gorillas' "hire and fire" policy, which uses long probationary periods to dismiss employees when it is convenient. In Santiago's case, Gorillas justified his dismissal by citing misconduct and alleged unexcused absences.

Now, based on news reports, the company is bracing itself for a possible major strike. According to social media, employees from other areas are to be used as riders if necessary, serving as strikebreakers.

The anger among workers is enormous and there have been calls made to extend the strike wave. Solidarity statements from other workers and the setting up of a solidarity fund on social media are expressions of this anger.

The strikes enjoy considerable public support, with increasing numbers of Gorilla customers declaring that they would no longer use the delivery service if conditions for the workers were not improved.

As the situation intensifies and the strikes widen, workers face urgent political questions. In order for their protests to be successful, Gorilla workers must reject the demand for the involvement of trade unions, which is being raised by several pseudo-left groups around the strike. The call for a works council dominated by the leadership of the NGG (Food, Beverages and Catering Union) is a political trap for

workers.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in an earlier article, the formation of a works council will do nothing to abolish the slave-labour conditions at Gorillas. Instead, it would cement and merely make official such exploitation. The WSWS calls upon Gorillas workers to form their own action committee to contact other logistic and transport workers and expand their industrial action.



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