

# Gorillas' delivery riders protest in Berlin for better working conditions

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19 July 2021

Riders for the food delivery service Gorillas protested last week against miserable working conditions and wages.

The protest started at the warehouse in Berlin's Tempelhof district. Around noon, the riders decided to stop work and travel from there in a bicycle protest to the next warehouse in nearby Neukölln. There, they sought to draw fellow workers into the strike and demonstration.

Gorillas workers were joined by supporters of the protest. There is strong support for the industrial action among workers. Several participants interviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site* pointed out the precarious conditions under which this section of the labour force works.

Riders criticised the lack of adequate gear which, despite the ongoing protests, has not been purchased by management on the grounds that it costs too much. Fernando, one of the riders, noted that they have not even been given proper rainwear. He also said that orders were often far too heavy for their backpacks and bicycles.

One of the organisers made clear that the protest was against the "poor working conditions" at Gorillas. She said that a list of demands had been handed to management weeks ago and "practically none of the demands have been met to date." The list of 19 demands includes equal pay for equal work, overtime pay and better work equipment, including ventilation systems in all warehouses and bicycles more suited for deliveries. A key demand is the immediate payment of outstanding wages. Workers say they were underpaid at the end of last month.

When asked if workers from other delivery services should also join the protest, she said, "Every worker faces more or less the same problems." This was

confirmed by a participant in the demonstration who is employed by the delivery service Lieferando. He too complained about poor pay. He said a colleague had been dismissed because he had demanded that protective measures against coronavirus infections be implemented. The problems were "very similar" to those of the Gorillas riders. In his company there are long probationary periods and everything is deliberately kept non-transparent.

The hire and fire policy at Gorillas is no exception among delivery services. A few weeks ago, the dismissal of a rider at Gorillas led to a spontaneous protest. Two warehouses were blockaded. The Lieferando worker had come to support his colleagues and fight to extend the protests to all delivery companies.

Oguz, who works as a researcher at Berlin's Technical University, also joined the protest to show his solidarity with the riders. He had spoken to delivery workers and they also confirmed that they do not receive their wages on time. "These people have no reserves when they have to pay their rent," Oguz noted.

The Gorillas workers face a ruthless management. While CEO Kagan Sümer has always feigned understanding for the riders and senior leaders of the company have repeatedly stated that improvements will be made, it became clear on Saturday that these are nothing more than empty words. The billion-dollar start-up is prepared for a direct confrontation with the workers.

When the bicycle protest was supposed to move to the warehouse on Urbanstraße in the early afternoon, management intervened. The warehouse manager of the Tempelhof site refused to give the riders keys for their bikes in order to prevent them from participating in the protest. The police then also supported management

and declared that the demonstration was not part of the strike and that company property could therefore not be used. This meant many participants were forced to get to Neukölln on foot or by public transport.

When the protesters arrived at Urbanstraße, the warehouse had already been closed and, according to the Gorillas app, orders were currently not possible in this neighbourhood. A city manager of the company prohibited workers at the Neukölln warehouse from participating in the strike and denied access to the warehouse to the protesters who had arrived to talk to their colleagues.

In a provocative statement, management said there was no basis for calling a strike because it was “not a works council.” The management brazenly claimed that there had been no spontaneous work stoppages and declared, “The short-term closure of individual warehouses was arranged by the company to protect our employees from hostility by a few.”

In Neukölln, the riders decided together not to undertake another bicycle demonstration, but to go in small groups to the warehouse in Muskauer Straße in Kreuzberg to call for a strike there. Here too, management had already stopped operations by then to prevent the strike from spreading. When riders then went to the Gürtelstraße warehouse in Friedrichshain, workers there also joined the strike and this warehouse also had to be closed in the early evening.

The workers at Gorillas and other delivery services are confronted with not just economic, but also political issues. In the statement, “Stop the slave labour! Build rank-and-file committees!” which was widely distributed at the demonstration, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) states: “Such a struggle against the appalling working conditions in logistics and other industries raises fundamental political questions. Just as the enrichment of shareholders is based on the exploitation of the working class, this exploitation can only be ended by the expropriation of the big banks and corporations by the international working class.”

That such a perspective could find broad support among workers is viewed with concern by the establishment politicians. Cansel Kiziltepe, Social Democratic Party (SPD) member of parliament, was present in Tempelhof. She told the *Tagesspiegel* that she wanted to support the Gorillas workers in their demand for co-determination and labour protection.

Kiziltepe was also the one who invited Federal Labour Minister Hubertus Heil (SPD) for next Tuesday, saying he wished to meet with riders to “talk about their work situation.”

In conversation with participants of the protest, Christoph Vandreier, the SGP’s lead candidate in the federal elections, made it clear that workers should have no illusions in the establishment parties. “It is precisely the SPD, the Greens, the Left Party and the trade unions who are responsible for the social misery and precarious working conditions. The Hartz laws [imposing welfare cuts and curtailing labour protections] are just one example.”

He referred to experiences from other industrial struggles where workers confront a united front of management, establishment parties and the trade unions: “A fight by the riders at Gorillas and all other delivery services can only be successful by building independent organisations of struggle across industrial sectors and national borders. Therefore, the SGP calls for the formation of action committees to organise this struggle,” said Vandreier.



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