

“Politicians have much more in common with the few who own everything than with the rest of us”

Gorillas delivery riders in Berlin criticise visit by German Labour Minister

Our reporters
26 July 2021

Last week, German Labour Minister Hubertus Heil (Social Democratic Party, SPD) used a meeting with employees of the Gorillas delivery service in Berlin for an outrageous election campaign and press appearance. The Gorillas riders have been on strike and protesting for weeks against disastrous working conditions, which were created in the first place by the Hartz labour laws and the austerity measures under the SPD government of Gerhard Schröder between 2003 and 2005.

Heil and the SPD are drumming up support for the election of a corporatist works council at Gorillas to keep workers’ resistance to the extreme exploitation under control and prevent the strikes from spreading. As in other factories, the establishment of a union-dominated works council at Gorillas would not improve workers’ situation but would contractually enforce their extreme exploitation. The spontaneous strikes and protests that have caused a great stir in recent weeks would be suppressed.

Heil’s visit has further fuelled the works council debate among the Gorillas workers. The fact that the minister and management are in favour of electing a works council has made many strikers even more sceptical about this initiative. Following Heil’s visit, the *World Socialist Web Site* conducted the following interview with 29-year-old Rider Josef, who is from Britain and works at Gorillas in Berlin.

WSWS: How do you see the outcome of the meeting with Labour Minister Heil?

Josef: My expectations were low, but I was still disappointed. While we already knew that it would be

essentially a press event for him and his election, we considered most of his responses to be worse than useless. We didn’t agree to meet a politician to be told to “organise better,” or to “follow the law.” These people are the ones who can change the law. Although he didn’t give any indication that this is a priority for him, perhaps now that we’ve met, we can at least call on him to follow through with the little help that he offered.

WSWS: How do you judge the fact that Heil first spoke with management without the workers being involved and that he did not report on the content of the talks?

Josef: That didn’t shock me. Ultimately, elected politicians are in favour of the status quo; of the system that got them to where they are. It’s foolish to expect them to take any risks for us. As I get older, I see that politicians have much more in common with the few who own everything than they do with the rest of us. At the end of the meeting, I asked him to film any subsequent meetings with management. My expectations here are also low.

WSWS: What do you think of the fact that the Minister of Labour and management are in favour of electing a works council?

Josef: Though I don’t believe that the management—despite their bizarre emails—are remotely in favour of the council, I think the minister’s interest betrays the severe limitations of it as a tool for real change. As I tried to tell him, between his little speeches, a works council isn’t the end of the road, it’s only one step. For me, the true project is the

involvement and empowerment of the entire workforce. If a works council takes us closer to that goal, great, but we must not forget it is merely a means to an end. And we must not forget that the rich and powerful will try to feed us a tiny slice of cake and then tell us that we should be satisfied.

WSWS: What do you think about the fact that Heil, as a top SPD politician, was directly involved in the passing of the Hartz laws? In 2003, he was on the executive of the parliamentary group that pushed through the law liberalizing the labour market and creating the conditions for today's "slave labour."

Josef: I'm new to Germany, so this is new territory for me, but it seems like the same story is unfolding everywhere. Politicians such as Heil make all these gestures towards the left while taking decisions that ruin people's lives. They justify their actions by reference to GDP or unemployment figures as if they indicated anything about human happiness at all. In the UK we have the same hollow politics of gesture—our ostensibly left-wing [Labour Party] leader, Keir Starmer, has about as many political convictions as a dead rabbit. I am sorry to see it here too. Yet, somehow, I remain optimistic.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) opposes the formation of a works council and proposes the formation of an independent rank-and-file committee. This would not make appeals to politicians and the trade unions, which are in fact on the other side of the barricades, but would mobilise fellow workers in other service, production, and administrative sectors. It would be oriented towards the growing struggles of the international working class, not to make capitalist exploitation bearable and "humanise" it, but to abolish it.

We call on all Gorillas workers to read and circulate our statement and to discuss this perspective with us.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact