Berlin bus workers support the 70,000 striking bus drivers in Maharashtra, India!

Action Committee of Transport Workers for Safe Workplaces (Berlin)
15 April 2022

More than 70,000 workers of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Company (MSRTC) have been on an indefinite strike since November 4, 2021. Their struggle has international significance. The workers are resisting the brutal reprisals of management and the courts, which have repeatedly declared their industrial action illegal. They are also waging their strike against the more than two dozen unions that claim to represent them. We are publishing here a letter of support from the Berlin Action Committee of Transport Workers for Safe Workplaces, who express their solidarity with the strike of their Indian colleagues.

Dear striking colleagues from the MSRTC,

We Berlin bus drivers have learned of your heroic and principled strike through the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Committee.

We wholeheartedly support your struggle.

We are deeply saddened by the dozens of suicides among your colleagues and wish to express our sympathy and solidarity with you and the bereaved. They, like your 350 colleagues who died from COVID-19, are victims of the ruthless profiteering of the transport company and the government.

At the same time, we strongly condemn the arrest of your fellow workers and demand their immediate release!

The Bombay High Court verdict against you is a clear class verdict.

Your decision last November to launch an indefinite strike against the planned privatisation of long-distance transport and the poorer working conditions and wages that go with it was and remains absolutely right.

No one has the right to declare your strike illegal and forcibly end it! Every worker in India and worldwide has the right to strike for a better and safer life.

But the courts unreservedly represent the interests of the privatisation profiteers, the banks, the billionaires, and the politicians bought by them from all the establishment parties.

We European bus drivers can tell you a lot about the disastrous effects of privatisation in the public sector.

More than 20 years ago, the European Union decided to privatise local and long-distance transport in the EU member states. Since then, the transport companies, which until then had relatively good wages and working conditions for transport workers, have been competing against each other on the market, trying to undercut each other on costs.

The transport company with the lowest personnel costs wins the tender and gets the market share for a few years. This affected and still affects not only local and long-distance public transport, but every aspect of public services: education, health, infrastructure, etc.

Europe's billionaires have become fat at our expense.

Seventeen years ago, the Berlin state government, with the support of the trade unions, cut the wages of all employees at the Berlin Public Transport Company (BVG) by 16 percent. At the same time, many additional benefits were cut. The level of exploitation was drastically intensified.

A whole generation of newly hired drivers receives 30 percent less pay than their predecessors. With a monthly wage of only about €2,000, we have to finance the high Berlin rents of about €1,000 and more for families, as well as the constantly rising cost of living. At the same time, we slave away in 6-day shifts lasting up to 56 hours.

Wage increases that are higher than the annual inflation rate, won in strikes, no longer exist. The unions make wage deals with management behind closed doors.

The policy of the unions here is the same as in your country and worldwide. They collect our dues but represent the company's interests against us. They make sure that our labour struggles are sold out and remain isolated.

This isolation is also why your heroic strike is in so much danger. As the WSWS wrote, your struggle is being "deliberately isolated" by the trade union federations and supposedly "left" parties, who have done nothing to mobilise other workers in your defence.

This is also the case in Germany and Europe. The unions always do everything they can to keep industrial action as small as possible. Their biggest fear is that we workers could unite across different companies and regional borders.

In the pandemic that has been going on since the beginning of 2020, they are firmly on the side of management and ensure that the profit interests of the corporations and the supervisory boards are enforced.

We have lost at least two of our colleagues here in Berlin because of the irresponsible pandemic policies, and all of us have risked our health and that of our families. But the trade unions boycotted our demand for safe workplaces to protect us against the risk of infection. That is why we formed our Action Committee for Safe Workplaces and are in struggle against the bad and unsafe working conditions. In doing so, we oppose the pro-capitalist programme of the trade unions who want to sacrifice our wages and carry out further privatisation together with the Berlin state government.

"Enough is enough!"

Against starvation wages, poor working conditions and the risk of infection—all the consequences of ruthless profiteering—we workers must defend our lives and health and that of our loved ones against the combined forces of management, unions, governments and the pseudo-leftists.

It is time to declare war on the trade unions, the Stalinist parties and the pseudo-left groups that want to dominate and divide us. For this, we need new organisations of struggle. Like us, you in Maharashtra need rank-and-file action committees to publicise your struggle and win support among all workers and rural peoples across the Indian subcontinent—in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where mass protests are taking place. We will use all our means to publicise your strike and mobilise support among bus drivers and other workers in Germany and Europe.

With fraternal greetings!

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wsws.org/contact