

New warning strikes at Deutsche Post

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A nationwide strike at Deutsche Post was extended through Saturday evening. It had begun at 5 p.m. Thursday afternoon, when the walkout by the night shift paralyzed sorting centres. And on Friday, parcel and letter delivery workers went on strike all day. The Verdi service union, which called the strike in two stages, is responding to the enormous willingness to fight that is spreading at Deutsche Post.

Postal workers are fighting for a wage increase of 15 percent over a period of 12 months. Trainees are to receive an extra €200 a month. According to a spokesman for Deutsche Post, some 16,700 postal workers had already joined the strike by midday on Friday, including 2,700 in Berlin and Brandenburg alone, 2,000 in southwest Germany, 2,500 in Bavaria and 5,500 in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. As a result of the strike, about 2.3 million parcel shipments and 13 million letters were left behind on Friday, which is more than half of the average daily volume.

Despite the problems involved, a large proportion of the population supports the postal strikes as being justified. This is expressed, among other things, in the comment sections of the media.

For example, a worker writes in the comments on broadcaster RBB's website: "Am I responsible for inflation? Am I waging war? Is it all my decisions? What are 15 percent wage demands compared to the reality of our expenses for living, livelihoods and pensions!"

Another writes that it is "more than justified and more than necessary to give workers a share of the profits and the increase in productivity, all the more so because otherwise the profits simply flow to the shareholders."

The Deutsche Post corporate board has dismissed the workers' pay demand as "unrealistic." However, it has reported profits of more than €8 billion in each of the last two years. At the same time, it refused to pay

employees the tax-free bonus of €3,000 made possible by government funding. Now the board, backed by the union, wants to continue its policy of enriching shareholders at the expense of the workers.

The previously state-owned Deutsche Post—now, "Deutsche Post DHL Group"—has pushed through an unprecedented reduction in wages and deterioration in working conditions since privatization. Entire divisions have been outsourced to subsidiaries and subcontractors. Today, almost 88 percent of the workforce—140,000 out of 160,000 on union-agreed contracts—are classified in pay groups 1 to 3, which range from €2,108 to €3,090 monthly gross. However, many distribution centres are located in expensive major cities, where rents and living costs are constantly rising.

In December, figures from the Federal Statistical Office showed that salaries in the postal and parcels sector have risen much less than in the economy as a whole since 2011. In those 10 years, they have increased by only 6 percent, while average incomes in the overall economy have increased by nearly 24 percent.

At the same time, night work and overtime have increased. In 2021, about 60 percent of mail carriers and sorters also had to work weekends. And one-in-seven postal employees also worked between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m.

Furthermore, the Federal Statistical Office data revealed a high level of atypical employment relationships. In 2021, nearly one-in-three postal, courier and express drivers (31 percent) was either employed on a temporary or part-time basis, in marginal employment or temporary agency staff. Thus, sorters and parcel and letter deliverers are fobbed off with low wages for hard back-breaking work, while the corporation, like the other logistics groups, profits not least from the growth in online shopping. This explains

the great willingness to strike in the postal and distribution centres.

However, the strikers confront the danger that Verdi will sell them out again this time. The union's chief negotiator, Verdi's deputy chairwoman Andrea Kocsis, is deliberately vague in her demand for "inflation compensation" and a "share in the company's success." This functionary, who collects more than half a million euros a year from supervisory board bonuses alone, is preparing to strike a rotten deal in the third round of negotiations to be held on February 8 and 9.

The current demand for a 15 percent pay increase was made against the will of the union. In a survey in which more than 43,000 members took part last autumn, the 10.5 percent demand currently being tabled by Verdi for the public sector was rejected by postal workers as insufficient. Sixty-five percent of Deutsche Post union members rejected that demand as too low, and some 91 percent said they were ready to strike.

In 2020, the last time there was industrial action at Deutsche Post, the union thwarted the willingness to strike and made the cuts in real wage possible with its settlement. The last agreement stipulated that wages and salaries would not rise at all in 2020 and then only by 3 percent on January 1, 2021, and by another 2 percent on January 1, 2022. By agreeing a contract period of 28 months, Verdi gave Deutsche Post almost two-and-a-half years of industrial peace.

In the meantime, the Verdi leadership, like the entire union bureaucracy in Germany, supported and went along with the profits-before-lives policy in the coronavirus pandemic, the escalating armaments spending and war policy of the coalition government. While the profits of the rich and shareholders have skyrocketed like never before, inflation has eaten away at wages with unprecedented increases in food and energy prices.

To change the situation and make the industrial struggle that has begun a real success, postal workers must take it into their own hands. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) proposes that rank-and-file action committees be formed in all workplaces, organized independently of Verdi, to place the struggle on an international and socialist basis.

These committees would establish contact with fellow workers in other logistics groups and postal services around the world. Worldwide, more than half a

million work for Deutsche Post/DHL. In Germany alone, the parcel service employs well over half a million (530,000).

The strike by postal workers in Germany is part of a new upsurge in the class struggle. In France, on the same day, January 19, 2 million workers went on strike against Macron's attacks on pensions. In Britain, workers in the National Health Service, railroads and postal services have been on strike on and off for months. Hundreds of rail workers are also currently on strike at SWEG in Stuttgart and HLB in northern Hesse, and 2.3 million public sector workers are preparing for the next collective bargaining round.



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