

Wage negotiations break down at Deutsche Post

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Contract bargaining between the trade union Verdi and Deutsche Post/DHL has broken down in the third round of negotiations. This was announced by Verdi's bargaining commission in Düsseldorf on Friday afternoon after two days of negotiations. At the same time, Verdi announced a strike ballot among its members at Deutsche Post. The union is recommending rejecting the latest offer from the Deutsche Post board and agreeing to an indefinite labour dispute.

Verdi is responding to the dissatisfaction among delivery staff and postal workers in distribution centres and workers' great willingness to fight. Verdi chief negotiator Andrea Kocsis has tried everything to smooth things over with the Deutsche Post board and avert a strike, and she will continue to do so. It would not be the first time following an overwhelming strike vote by its members that a German union renounced industrial action and signed a sellout.

Most recently, Kocsis spoke publicly only of an "acceptable offer" that had to be on the table, without mentioning the specific demand for 15 percent. This had been pushed through by union members at Deutsche Post against the will of the Verdi leadership when they rejected the union's original proposal for 10.5 percent in a ballot with a two-thirds majority, with 90 percent declaring their willingness to strike.

Nearly 100,000 postal workers have participated in warning strikes throughout Germany in recent weeks. The day before the latest negotiations, thousands of postal workers took part in strikes and rallies in Hamburg, Dortmund, Saarbrücken, Nuremberg, Stuttgart and Frankfurt am Main. Last Monday, large strike rallies were held in 10 cities, including Berlin, Munich and Rostock, under conditions where, nationwide, teachers, nurses, kindergarten workers, sanitation workers and the entire public sector are

currently in collective bargaining.

Postal workers are fighting back against miserable wages and slave-like conditions. Almost 90 percent of the 160,000 employees are organised in pay groups 1 to 3, which means they must work in a low-wage range of €2,100 to €3,090 gross each month. Their last pay increase was over a year ago, in January 2022, and amounted to just 2 percent. Since then, because of the Ukraine war, sanctions against Russia and unprecedented inflation, prices for electricity and gas, food and gasoline have climbed to dizzying heights.

A parcel delivery worker from the expensive city of Wiesbaden told the WSWs that his rent alone, with utilities, had risen from €1,100 to €1,500 since last year, and that he now had to add €50 a week for gasoline. He was considering taking on a second job on Sundays but did not know whether he could manage it since his work for Deutsche Post meant delivering about 200 parcels a day, with at least 10 percent weighing more than 30 kilos. At the union rally he was carrying a hand-made poster with the inscription: "Mucho trabajo—poco dinero/Much work—little money." Another placard read: "We toil in all weather, but only your [shareholders'] bank accounts get fatter and fatter."

The Deutsche Post board arrogantly rejected the demand for 15 percent, which would not even compensate for the true level of inflation, as being "out of touch with reality," and insisted on a 24-month contract term, during which there would be no industrial action. Its latest offer includes a €340 increase in collectively agreed wages—but only from 2024 and in two stages. For the current year 2023, Deutsche Post only wants to pay out the (government subsidised) tax-free inflation bonus of €3,000, also in two stages. This should have already been paid to

employees last year!

At the same time, Deutsche Post/DHL generated an operating profit of €8.4 billion in 2022. This was only thanks to the back-breaking work of parcel and letter carriers and sorters. As for the board members and management negotiators, they are not shy about helping themselves: Deutsche Post CEO Frank Appel collected more than €10 million as the highest-paid CEO of a DAX-listed corporation in the crisis year 2020. Human resources chief Thomas Ogilvie, chief management negotiator, also pockets around €2 million for the services he provides to Deutsche Post.

The income received by Andrea Kocsis, Verdi's chief negotiator, means she, too, lives on a completely different planet from the postal workers whose interests she is supposed to represent. For her seat on the Deutsche Post/DHL supervisory board alone, she collected more than a quarter of a million euros (€264,000) in 2021, in addition to her normal income as deputy chairwoman of Verdi.

When Verdi now declares the negotiations a failure, it is in a desperate effort not to lose control of a growing social movement. As is becoming increasingly clear, the postal workers' struggle is part of a European-wide movement. In France, millions of workers took to the streets again last week against the Macron government's attempt to worsen pensions. In Britain, too, the strike movement is growing by the day; NHS nurses are involved in the biggest labour dispute in their history. A mass strike movement is also building in Belgium, Finland and elsewhere.

If there is an indefinite postal workers' strike in Germany now, it will coincide with disputes in the public sector, at schools and nurseries, and in the auto and supplier industries. Everywhere, workers are fighting for better conditions or trying to defend themselves against layoffs and plant closures. In Germany alone, no fewer than 11 million employees are engaged in collective bargaining and labour disputes. Across Europe, it is tens of millions.

More and more, workers are fighting not only against attacks on jobs, social provisions and poor conditions, but also against the rearmament and war policies of their governments. Whether in Frankfurt or during warning strikes in Berlin, everywhere the WSWS spoke to workers about this they reacted with disgust, rejecting the war policies of the "traffic light" coalition

of the Social Democrats (SPD), Liberal Democrats and Greens.

"They are able to finance battle tanks and weapons for war, but there is no money for us," said a postal worker from Aschaffenburg. She mentioned her grandmother, who could still vividly remember World War II: "We really don't need that again."

Other workers carried posters for the earthquake victims in Anatolia, Turkey. In Frankfurt, postal workers had written on their banner, "We're fighting for 15 percent, but our thoughts are in Turkey and Syria." While they collected donations among the strikers for the victims of the horrific disaster, the Scholz government and the European Union are unapologetically tightening the borders around "Fortress Europe" and sharpening their deportation policies.

Faced with the deep divide between "those up there" who risk a third world war and senselessly enrich themselves—like the Deutsche Post board and shareholders—and the millions of workers forced to live on diminishing low wages and facing increasing work pressure and the prospect of war, resistance is growing across Europe. But the struggle can no longer be left to unions like Verdi, which collaborates with the employers and whose leadership belongs to the same parties as the warmongers in parliament. If Verdi cannot avoid an indefinite strike at Deutsche Post, it will do everything it can to keep it on the back burner and to steer it into a dead end, so that the present conditions do not change fundamentally and profits are secured.

To change this situation, independent rank-and-file action committees in all workplaces are needed to take the fight into workers' own hands. Such committees would establish international cooperation between workers across national borders and advance a socialist program. Above all, what is required is a new leadership: a workers' party that fundamentally puts lives above profits. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is that party.



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