

Deutsche Post strike ballot: Postal Workers Action Committee call for strike receives strong support

Dietmar Gaisenkersting
7 March 2023

The call by the Postal Workers Action Committee for rank-and-file workers to take the approaching strike at Deutsche Post DHL into their own hands to prevent a sell-out of the labour dispute by the Verdi trade union has been met with strong support. In just the first few days, it has been accessed more than 25,000 times. Many postal workers have contacted the action committee to report on their own working conditions, their attitude towards Verdi and also to raise the issue of the Ukraine war and the international development of the class struggle.

Many workers at delivery hubs and distribution centres also took flyers with the action committee's statement for their colleagues. Both the online feedback and the reactions when distributing flyers show that there is huge dissatisfaction in the workforce. Representatives of Verdi and Deutsche Post office have reacted to the call with anger.

Deutsche Post is offering to increase wages only starting from 2024, by around €150 per month and then again in December 2024, by around €190. The company wants to spread payment of the government subsidised tax-free one-off payment of €3,000 over a period of 24 months.

All indications are that in the current ballot significantly more than the required 75 percent of Verdi members will reject the offer and vote for an indefinite strike. However, Verdi wants to prevent an all-out strike if possible.

Younger workers are angry about the low wages, which increasingly make it difficult to get by, especially in the big cities. The lowest wage group at Deutsche Post starts on an hourly wage of €12.60, while delivery staff receive €14.34. At the same time, new hires receive fewer bonuses than those who have been employed for many years. "So it can be that one colleague gets around €600 less per month than the other, even though they both do the same job," a delivery worker reported.

In Leipzig, a single parent explained that because of the poor pay and working conditions, 10 of her colleagues had quit in the last three months. "And if Deutsche Post's offer

is accepted, we will all quit here." At the end of the month, she says, there is nothing left. As a single parent, she can't even take the children on vacation.

A 23-year-old parcel delivery driver from Baden-Württemberg complained about deteriorating working conditions at the delivery hub where he works. "Driving all day is not an easy job, you need to concentrate a lot during your delivery round and then muster the strength to carry the packages." He believes the 15 percent increase workers are demanding is more than legitimate. "If you took into account the exorbitant price increases for all life's necessities, the demand should actually be much higher than 15 percent," he said. His colleague agreed: "It's not possible to live a decent life on what we earn now."

Long-time employees are particularly angry about the ever-increasing workload. They report that "the McKinsey people on the board" are using increasingly sophisticated methods to increase workloads. One of the latest changes involved making delivery routes more flexible.

"The amount of mail hasn't increased," reported one delivery worker, "but I now have much longer routes. I used to have 20 kilometres to walk, now it's 25 kilometres a day." But working conditions are not what Verdi and Deutsche Post are concerned about, he said. "They sit together on the supervisory board." They always say that "bad working conditions don't exist in Germany, only in China. But that's not true, of course."

The delivery worker recalled that "in the early days of the labour movement, there was a constant fight over wages and working conditions. Today, wages are raised marginally, and we have to work more for them." That was not a healthy way to reach retirement, he added.

Scepticism among workers about Verdi is high. "Older colleagues have already told me that Verdi is on the side of the employer," reported a young delivery worker from southern Germany. He had asked his [union] works council representative whether the strike would start immediately

after the strike ballot. “He hesitated, then said they didn’t know if they would stagger the strike, and so on.” He went on to say he was certain that “If they sell us out, then 80 percent of us here will walk out of Verdi.”

Verdi and management at the delivery hubs reacted with corresponding nervousness. In Duisburg, three representatives from management and Verdi approached supporters of the Postal Workers Action Committee in front of the company premises and tried to forbid them from distributing the flyers. Two of them reacted extremely angrily. They insinuated that the flyer was calling for “wildcat strikes.” In addition, one of them said, “The colleagues don’t understand that at all.”

The action committee supporters stood their ground. When a manager snatched a flyer from a worker’s hand, saying, “You don’t need this,” the worker turned to the action committee supporters and took a second one.

According to reports, Verdi shop stewards are demonizing the flyer and the WWS. “I should forget about it, it’s slander, I was told,” reported one delivery worker. He was told not to pass on the flyer, one must “keep one’s feet still in this situation,” they told me. “That made my ears prick up,” he said.

Like him, many who have contacted the action committee fear that the strike will be called off at the last minute—or that it will be conducted half-heartedly and ineffectively “staggered.”

“You have to really step on the employers’ toes, not organize these gentle strikes,” said one worker. A DHL delivery worker from Baden-Württemberg supports preparing for a strike, “but not just for one or two days.” He thinks “a strike should be for a month or longer, all parcels have to stay put and not be delivered.” Only “if DHL loses money, then they will give in.”

Several postal workers addressed the obvious connection between the billions in profits being made by Deutsche Post and workers’ worsening working conditions and falling wages. They also understood that the high level of inflation was a result of the war in Ukraine and explicitly called for its immediate end.

As one parcel delivery worker put it, many think: “Who supports wars that bring death and destruction?” Another colleague asked, “Support Ukraine, what does that mean?” and concluded, “We’ll have to pay for it.”

A young postal worker liked that the action committee “addresses delivery workers at other providers, that you must fight together. We already have lousy wages, but the others are even worse off.”

One of the initiators of the Postal Workers Action Committee, who is employed in administration, was pleased with the great response to the call. The growing movement

against Deutsche Post and Verdi must be seen in a larger context, he said. “Because it turns out that although developments in each country have their own characteristics, it is the same everywhere. All over the world, workers are standing up against their ever-growing impoverishment and the steady enrichment of the wealthy.”

Now, he added, there was the cost of war. “At the same time, I think the position that Putin alone is responsible for the war is fundamentally wrong.” They should “all publish their secret plans and agreements. Then we would see who is responsible for what. Germany and the US are escalating the war; also, because they themselves are in an enormous crisis.” Those who profit from war have no interest in ending it, he said. “The arms companies are earning big, the workers, for example, in the public sector, are supposed to tighten their belts to bear the costs of the war, according to [Defence Minister Boris] Pistorius.”

Workers therefore confronted political issues. “The parties in Berlin and the unions are on the other side,” he said. “We workers need our own organization, in the workplaces and also our own political party, and it has to be international.” Global problems such as climate change and the threat of war can only be solved internationally, he said. This was also evident in social questions: “Only by workers looking beyond their own company and even their own country, recognizing their common problems and goals, do we have a chance to counter the current developments.”

It is now urgent that the Postal Workers Action Committee be further strengthened. The results of the ballot will be announced on March 9. “Only by taking action ourselves now and joining forces independently,” the call states, “can we defend our wages and working conditions.”

The Action Committee can be reached simply by sending a WhatsApp message to +491633378340.



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact