

Ongoing warning strikes in Germany's public sector

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Public sector workers in several federal states in Germany have been continuing to take part in warning strikes since Monday. Like last week, strikes in Berlin, Saxony, Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania affected refuse collection, hospitals, nurseries, public transit. On Wednesday, around 70,000 employees nationwide took part in the warning strikes in day care centers and social facilities.

While there is enormous anger and willingness to fight among workers, who are not prepared to accept further cuts to real wages, the service sector union Verdi is doing everything to prevent a broad mobilization. It is organizing the warning strikes strictly separately and with about as much impact as a pinprick. In the background, the union bureaucrats have long been working on a deal with the employers that will mean severe cuts to wages.

This became clear in Berlin, for example, where on Monday and Tuesday workers at the municipal cleansing service (BSR), the water utility company (BWB), many hospitals, the municipal nurseries and the job centres went on strike. On both days, Verdi had moved the two central strike rallies to outside BSR headquarters, which is so remote and hard to get to the public would not notice or be able to participate.

As a result, only 400 workers (mainly from BSR and BWB) came to the rally on Monday and just 250 on Tuesday. Even though there was a large presence of Verdi shop stewards and officials, conversations with ordinary workers revealed the enormous anger about the cuts in real wages, their willingness to fight and dissatisfaction with Verdi's limited actions.

"The offer from the federal and local governments is laughable," said one 40-year-old BSR worker, for example. "Five percent over three years, and apprentices are supposed to get just half." Adding that

this did not even begin to compensate for inflation, they said, "More are participating in the strike now, many service segments are coming together now."

In nursing, low wages are already leading to permanent understaffing on the wards, making work unbearable for the remaining staff. "At the moment, we have a minimum staffing of one registered nurse for every five patients, and often it is even more," said Marianne, for example, who works as a nurse in the neurological early rehabilitation unit of the Jewish Hospital. There should be one nurse for three patients, she says, "then they could really be cared for in a patient-oriented way, the way they actually need it."

"We are here to put more pressure on the upcoming negotiations, but I don't have much hope that anything will happen," says another health care worker. "Without a big strike, nothing will be achieved. Although there aren't many of us here, it's good that we now have strikers from many service segments, nurses from hospitals, refuse workers, Berlin water utility workers, educators, people from administration."

WSWS supporters distributed the article "Governments make provocative offer to German public sector workers" and discussed the perspective of a Europe-wide strike and a socialist program against cuts in real wages and the pro-war policies of all governments.

The strikes in Germany are part of an explosive movement of the working class across Europe. In France, millions are striking against pension cuts; in Greece, hundreds of thousands have been striking and protesting amid a surge of anger over the deaths of 57 people in the February 28 train crash. In Britain, hundreds of thousands have been striking against wage cuts and attacks on the right to strike.

"It's actually right that people should unite

internationally,” Matti, a 25-year-old worker at the water company, said in response. “I’m not in the union,” he continued, “but I’m still striking today with my colleagues. I don’t want a representative who sits on the employer’s lap during negotiations and then presents us with a fait accompli. I noticed that during the last strike. The energy that is generated is dissipated in small actions. I’m of the opinion that if you’re going to go on strike, you have to use all your strength.”

His colleague, Klaus, 35, also saw a clear connection between the cuts in real wages and the German government’s pro-war policy: “It is right when you say that the city administration is trying to save on wage costs in the public sector to compensate for the increased costs of the war in Ukraine. That’s been the case throughout history—workers are being asked to pay for the war. It’s the same in every country.”

As the WSWS article distributed to the strikers states, “All this shows that public sector workers face a political struggle and can only defend their interests by building action committees which operate independently of Verdi.

“It is not just about defending the conditions of existence of the working class, but also halting the rapid development towards a third world war. This is only possible on the basis of internationalism and a socialist programme that prioritises human life over profit.”



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