Despite 86 percent vote in favour, Verdi seeks to prevent a strike at Deutsche Post

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10 March 2023

In the strike ballot at Deutsche Post DHL that ended Wednesday, 85.9 percent of the approximately 100,000 Verdi union members voted in favour of a strike. But Verdi is not thinking of organising a strike and regards its main task as preventing one.

Although the threshold of 75 percent in favour was clearly exceeded, Verdi stated tersely in an initial statement Thursday: “Deutsche Post today called on Verdi to resume collective bargaining. Negotiations will continue on Friday, March 10, 2023.” Deutsche Post has not even submitted an offer yet. Nevertheless, Verdi wants to hold talks until Saturday noon.

Verdi thus opposes the decision of some 90,000 of its members and is backing the company’s top management, which has just celebrated making record profits. On Thursday, Deutsche Post CEO Frank Appel announced €5.35 billion in net profits, an increase of over 6 percent. Operating profits rose to €8.4 billion, while sales increased by 16 percent to over €94 billion. But there is supposedly no money for the €1 billion that a 15 percent wage increase would cost annually.

In an internal online meeting for works council representatives and shop stewards at Deutsche Post, attended by up to 2,400, Verdi chief negotiator Andrea Kocsis provided the arguments that would be used to justify a lousy deal for the workforce. This year’s record result would not be achieved next year, she said, the economy was weakening. “That’s why it [Deutsche Post] expected only six to seven billion euros in profits next year.”

Deutsche Post workers, on the other hand, are ready to strike. This was also evident in the feedback many gave to the Postal Workers Action Committee. They had already suspected in the last few days that Verdi wanted to stall the strike even before it had begun.

“We are all irritated,” one worker from Bavaria said yesterday on the phone. Her Verdi representative had told her she didn’t know if the strike would even happen, and that would be discussed on Friday. “We all planned it differently,” said the postal worker, who has worked at Deutsche Post for 30 years. “We want to strike. Especially in these times, it’s important to stand up for our interests.”

In the online meeting, Kocsis was joined by deputy negotiator Stephan Teuscher in justifying Verdi’s strikebreaking. Teuscher said verbatim, “Our goal is to avert a labour dispute.” While Verdi was “very satisfied with the result of the strike ballot,” Teuscher said, “The right thing is, that won’t solve the problem, after all. Because the problem is to push through a good compromise, a good collective agreement.”

Teuscher could not express more clearly that Verdi does not even consider enforcing a good pay result with the help of a strike.

Kocsis added that they could have called industrial action today. “But we’ve said, now we won’t organise industrial action Friday and Saturday. Because then the employers would be so pissed off, annoyed and pissed off again.” After all, Deutsche Post CEO Frank Appel and Thomas Ogilvie, chief human resources officer and labour director, had already made that known, she said. “They can strike until they drop,” Kocsis said, summing up their stance. “We have now said we don’t need such a bad mood for the [next] two days now.”

The online event was designed to keep participants’ discontent out of sight. Only moderator Julia Klein could see the entire chat. At the beginning, she read out some grovelling posts. But at some point, she felt compelled to read out critical remarks as well. For example, one participant said it was a “slap in the face of all Verdi members” that negotiations would now continue. “Now there has to be a strike. This is impossible from Verdi.”

Teuscher responded, “I don’t share that view. The point of the strike is, with the strike notice and with the strike ballot and with the strike itself, to make it clear to the employer what will happen if they don’t try to reach a compromise in negotiations.”

When asked why there wasn’t a strike, as the members had decided, Kocsis responded: “Because the pressure is so particularly great right now. We forced Deutsche Post back

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to the bargaining table."

So, while workers want to use a nationwide all-out strike to force through their demand for a 15 percent wage increase over a 12-month period, Verdi wants to prevent just that. Verdi fears that a strike at Deutsche Post would immediately encourage public sector employees to also take all-out strike action, and that a powerful wave of strikes would develop against wage theft and cutbacks, as in France, Greece and Britain.

This is because Verdi does not stand for the interests of the workers but is the extended arm of the corporations. Ten union functionaries and Verdi works council representatives sit on the 20-member Deutsche Post Supervisory Board, collectively receiving over €1 million annually, including Deutsche Post works council members Thomas Koczelnik, Thomas Held, Stefanie Weckesser, Mario Jacubasch, Ulrike Lennartz-Pipenbacher and Gabriele Gülzau, as well as Verdi functionaries Rolf Bauermeister, Teuscher and Kocsis. The latter is also deputy chairwoman of the Deutsche Post Supervisory Board, for which she receives a quarter of a million euros a year for her work.

It is the supervisory board that agreed the hiring of people from management consultants McKinsey as board members, approves their salaries and decides on fundamental issues such as flexibilization.

This is the case in all public corporations and sectors. Verdi is closely linked with the public sector employers and the establishment parties through a diverse and tightly bound network. The current head of Verdi, Frank Werneke, has been a member of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party (SPD) for 40 years. His predecessor, Frank Bsirske, sweetened his retirement from the union financially by sitting as a member of the Green Party in the Bundestag (federal parliament). Numerous Verdi functionaries are members of the Bundestag parties, above all the SPD, Greens, and the Left Party. Many positions in public companies are given to "deserving" party members or Verdi functionaries.

To this day, more than 30 years after the privatisation of Deutsche Bundespost began, the state is still the largest shareholder in Deutsche Post. The government holds more than 20 percent of the shares through the federally owned Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). The chairman of KfW's board of directors is German Economics Minister Robert Habeck, of the Green Party.

So, if Deutsche Post increases its dividend this year thanks to making record profits and again pays out well over €2 billion in dividends, the government will receive almost half a billion.

Verdi wants to make sure this money continues to be squeezed out of the workforce. On Saturday, the union wants to announce a negotiation result. Without being specific, Kocsis and Teuscher indicated that they consider both the 15 percent demand and the 12-month term to be unrealistic. On Saturday, they and the bargaining committee will sign off on a sellout and put it to the next ballot. Then Verdi will do everything in its power to enforce the offer and prevent a strike.

The last few days have made two things clear. First, that the 15 percent wage increase can only be pushed through by an all-out strike against Deutsche Post. And second, that an all-out strike can only be implemented against Verdi.

Postal workers are therefore urged to join the new independent Postal Workers Action Committee and to set up their own rank-and-file committees at their delivery hubs and distribution centres. Verdi must be stripped of its mandate for further negotiations in order to organize a nationwide strike.

Such a strike would have an enormous impact. It would galvanize the 2.5 million public sector workers in Germany who, for their part, face the same problems and opponents. Postal and logistics workers in other European countries, who are fighting for their wages and working conditions, would also follow suit.

The great willingness of Deutsche Post workers to strike is part of the reawakening of the European working class, which in many countries and numerous industries is increasingly standing up and fighting against the costs of the NATO war against Russia being imposed on them and the accompanying social devastation. In France, Greece, Belgium, the UK, Israel—hundreds of thousands are on the streets everywhere. These struggles must be united against the governments and their allies in the trade unions.

The first step is to contact the Postal Workers Action Committee by WhatsApp message to the mobile number +491633378340.

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