

“The union declares the contract struggle over, but we’re just getting started!”

Lively discussion at online meeting of the Postal Action Committee in Germany

Our reporters
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The second online public meeting of the Postal Action Committee in Germany unanimously passed a resolution that begins with the words, “The second ballot was one big scam to push through cuts in real wages.”

This is followed by an explanation of why building the independent action committee is crucial right now: “In France, millions are on strike against Macron’s pension cuts; in Britain, postal workers and hundreds of thousands of other workers are on strike. Among the 2.6 million federal and municipal workers here in Germany, action committees are also forming right now to take the fight into their own hands and push through a strike. Such a strike would immediately put the issues back on the agenda here.”

The meeting was attended by about two dozen members and supporters of the Postal Action Committee. In his opening remarks, Dietmar Gaisenkersting, who reports on the industrial struggle at Deutsche Post for the *World Socialist Web Site*, drew attention to the great importance and growing interest in the Postal Action Committee. In the past weeks two things had become completely clear, Gaisenkersting said, “First: The Verdi union executive wanted to push through real wage reductions under all circumstances. And second, it wanted to prevent a strike at all costs.”

This could only be explained by the close collaboration between the union, government, and corporations, he said. The reason for this was not just personal corruption, although this of course also played a role. It was well known that ten Verdi officials sat on the supervisory board of Deutsche Post, where they lined their pockets. But even more important, he added, was the fact that the unions fully support the capitalist profit economy and are closely linked to the government. Postal workers, he said, faced not only Deutsche Post and Verdi, but also the government.

Eugen, who works at a delivery hub in Franken, said that for him, there was not the slightest doubt that the figures on the strike ballot were falsified: “It can’t be at all like they say, they’re lying to us.” At the main regional works meeting in Coburg, he said, he had seen for himself how Verdi officials campaigned for a yes vote. What was striking, he said, was that the moment more and more critical questions were asked, the meeting ended very quickly. “Suddenly they said, you have to go to your buses, don’t miss the return trip, etc.”

“Verdi betrayed us, that’s very clear. It was like that in 2015, and then in 2017, and now again.” At the same time, he said, work stress

has become even worse in the last three years. Eugen described how workloads had become almost unbearable due to changed shift schedules and additional shifts. “It’s been hell—and now wage cuts, that’s the thanks I get.”

Angelika spoke next; she works at a delivery hub in southern Germany. She supported Eugen. “I can’t imagine that first 86 percent vote for strike and then supposedly over 60 percent vote against and for acceptance.” But she also had concerns, she said. After all, if the strike vote were held again, it would be hard to get more than 75 percent. In a second contribution, she asked how the action committee could be built up. It would require a lot of strength and courage, she said. At the moment, she felt like she was “caught between two stools.”

This led to a discussion about the importance of international cooperation. Other members of the action committee explained that it was only through close international ties and active cooperation that the true strength of the working class becomes visible. The role of the unions, they said, was precisely to divide and oppress the workers.

At the beginning of the meeting, Gaisenkersting had already emphasized that the Postal Action Committee was part of an international mobilization of workers and reported how he had just participated in an online meeting of Royal Mail workers in Britain.

Further details about this meeting and the disputes of UK postal workers were then reported by Tony Robson, who writes on this for the WSW and had already spoken at the first meeting of the Postal Action Committee.

Royal Mail workers had taken the first step in forming a Rank-and-File Committee in the UK the day before, “It is directed against the Communication Workers Union (CWU) sabotaging the fight of the 115,000 employees, which has been going on for eight months. Just like Verdi in Germany, the CWU has trampled on the willingness of its members to fight against Royal Mail,” Robson explained.

Postal workers in Britain had been on strike for a total of 18 days from August to December last year, but the CWU was holding talks behind closed doors at the conciliation board on new cost-cutting measures, he said. In mid-February, 96 percent had voted to strike, but a handful of union bureaucrats ignored the demands of more than 100,000 postal workers, Robson reported. The CWU leadership was willing to accept a three-year contract and just a 9 percent wage increase over 18 months, and tied to productivity targets at that, he said.

“Postal workers have made it clear that they have lost all faith in the union bureaucracy,” Robson said. “The formation of the Rank-and-File Committee is crucial to giving workers a strategy for fighting for their interests and mobilizing their strength in an open struggle against Royal Mail and its partners in the Conservative government.”

Gregor Link, an editor for WSWs, then reported on recent events in France, where he has been reporting on the ground.

“What is happening in France are the biggest mass strikes and protests since the May-June 1968 general strike,” he began. President Macron’s pension cuts were expected to pour hundreds of billions of euros into the coffers of the government and military over the next few years.

The social anger currently being unleashed in France had been building up for years, he said. Next Friday should see the next nationwide day of action and mass strike. But the unions, just as in Germany and Britain, were trying to lead the movement into a dead end.

“The union tops are working closely with the government to defuse the movement, sell out the strikes and ultimately push through Macron’s attacks against the resistance of the working class and the people,” Link explained.

An important discussion then developed about the importance of opposing the Ukraine war and the rapid military build-up.

Eugen said he comes from a Russian-German family and was from Ukraine. While it was true that there was a connection between the billions spent on military rearmament and wage reduction, he said that rearmament was also necessary to stop Putin’s war.

Christoph Vandreier, chairman of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), responded to this extensively. He stressed that “under no circumstances should workers allow themselves to be drawn into this war and become part of the pro-war policy...This has always been a central issue in the labour movement.”

Workers must not “let themselves be led around by the nose and believe the propaganda.” War policy, he said, is always pursued in the interest of big business and the ruling capitalist class. Vandreier recalled World War I, when the Social Democratic Party (SPD) leadership supported the war with the argument that it was necessary to fight against the Tsar, who was oppressing the Russian workers. In reality, he said, the German ruling class, like all the other powers involved, sought to impose its own economic interests militarily.

“This is also the case today,” Vandreier stressed. “The Putin regime is waging war for the interests of the Russian oligarchy, not for the Russian workers, who have only to suffer under the war. This is equally true for Ukraine and, of course, for NATO. It is not defending freedom and democracy in Ukraine, but its economic interests.”

This was also shown by the wars of the last thirty years in Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, in which the US and NATO had destroyed entire societies in violation of international law in order to impose their world hegemony and economic interests.

“What is the perspective?” asked Vandreier. “That Germany will keep rearming until it is possible to win the war against Russia? Against a nuclear power? That means nuclear war. And what is the Russian perspective—to fight a nuclear war?”

In no country, he said, did the ruling class have a progressive solution to this war. Only the workers could offer a perspective. They would have to fight together against exploitation by global corporations, which now included Deutsche Post / DHL. This international cooperation, he said, was ultimately the basis for

stopping the war and preventing a nuclear inferno. He quoted the words of the great German socialist and courageous opponent of war Karl Liebknecht, who had already said during the First World War: “The main enemy is always at home!”

In the end, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

Dear fellow postal workers,

The second strike ballot was a complete fraud to push through cuts in real wage against us. Many colleagues report that there was hardly any opportunity to cast their vote and that the result does not reflect the mood in the workplaces. Verdi has so far refused to publish any data on the vote, making the whole ballot completely opaque to members and thus undemocratic.

In fact, we had voted 86 percent in favour of strike action, and this democratic ballot was sabotaged by Verdi. The whole procedure in this wage dispute shows that Verdi is not on our side, but on the side of the company management and the government. From the very beginning, it was all about how the severe real wage cuts that Verdi has now signed up to can be pushed through against us. Verdi did not shy away from fraud and lies in the process.

Now the unions have declared our wage struggle over. But we have only just begun to take up the fight. In France, millions are on strike against Macron’s pension cuts; in Britain, postal workers and hundreds of thousands of other workers recently went on strike. Among the 2.6 million federal and municipal workers here in Germany, too, action committees are now forming to take the fight into their own hands and push through a strike. Such a strike would immediately put the issues that confront us back on the agenda.

It is therefore crucial now to organize independently of Verdi in our action committee, to unite internationally and to wage a serious struggle. We do not accept the new contract, because it has come about through fraud and lies. Because Verdi overrode our clear strike vote, resubmitted the old offer with very minor changes and then talked it up with lies. And because there are considerable doubts about the validity of the result of the second ballot and the vote cannot be verified.

We therefore call on you to become active now and join us. Send us messages with your experiences during the ballot. Demand that those in charge of the vote in your workplace release the results there, including the turnout. We will not accept a handful of bureaucrats trampling on our democratic decision and declaring our struggle over.

Contact the Action Committee via Whatsapp message to the mobile number +491633378340.



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