

Truck drivers on strike for three weeks in South Hesse, Germany

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A brutal military-style attack at a rest stop in Germany, carried out by a Polish private militia on striking truck drivers from Eastern Europe, sheds a harsh light on the slave-like conditions under which thousands of long-distance truck drivers work in this industry.

For three weeks now, a group of Eastern European truck drivers have been on strike at a rest stop in southern Hesse because they have gone two months without pay. On Friday morning, the business owner Lukasz Mazur, whose group of companies employs the drivers, tried to break the strike in a brutal attack.

Mazur drove up to the rest stop together with a private security service, a film crew and three minibuses full of replacement drivers. The notorious Rutkowski Patrol private militia used an armoured vehicle and 18 thugs in bulletproof vests who attacked the strikers and tried to take over the trucks.

Supporters on the scene alerted the police, who arrived in large numbers. They sealed off the rest area and temporarily detained the 18 thugs along with the contractor. One worker who had been beaten and injured had to be taken to hospital on Saturday.

So far, more than 65 drivers have joined the strike with their trucks at the Gräfenhausen-West freeway service station on the A5. They are not only demanding their outstanding wages, but also fair pay and decent working conditions.

The strikers drive for the Lukmaz, Agmaz and Imperii group of companies, which belong to the family of Polish freight-forwarding entrepreneur Lukasz Mazur. The group maintains a fleet of about 1,000 trucks that transport goods and production components for large corporations across Germany and southern Europe. The multinationals that use them have signed up to International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards to supposedly ensure workers' rights throughout their supply chains, but they show no regard for the drivers' conditions.

The drivers are from Georgia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and the company employs workers from all over Eastern Europe, as well as from the Philippines and Nepal.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Edwin Atema, a member of the Dutch trade union FNV, who is negotiating on behalf of the workers, explained: "The trucking company brings drivers from all over the world to exploit them and make a lot of money from it ... Everyone in this whole chain makes a pile of money except the people who do the work: the truck drivers. This businessman—a classic example—owns a Rolex and drives a Lamborghini, and the workers who keep it all going are here fighting for their rights."

When the drivers went on strike on March 20, they had not been paid for 50 days. The drivers are said to be paid around €80 a day, which amounts to a pittance. Even if they drove eight hours a day (as required), this sum would be far below the German minimum wage of €12 an hour. However, they are usually on the road for 13 to 15 hours.

The workers point to several thousand euros each, mid-four-figure sums, that are being withheld from them. They are determined to continue the strike at least until they get this money, which their families desperately need. Their working conditions mean they see their loved ones far too little, as they practically live in their truck. One driver had not been able to visit his family for over a year.

One of the strikers, Vasil from Georgia, who translated the WSWs questions into Russian via Italian and Spanish, showed pictures of his house and the village where his relatives live.

The workers were excited that WSWs is informing fellow truckers across Europe and around the world about their strike. Their struggle is especially directed at other employees of those large corporations they drive for, such as VW, Ikea, and Deutsche Post DHL.

In recent weeks, there have already been limited strikes in South Tyrol, Switzerland and Lower Saxony, but the

strike in southern Hesse is the only one to be continuing. Through the Georgian trade union GTUC, the strikers have contacted the Dutch Road Transport Due Diligence Team (RTDD) and the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) Fair Mobility project, which includes a Russian-speaking translator. Food and other assistance are coming from the Caritas charity and several food banks in the area. Dutch RTDD organizer Edwin Atema is leading the negotiations for the strikers.

The truckers strike in southern Hesse and the attack by fascist thugs on them shed light on the brutal conditions of exploitation in the heart of Europe. The truck drivers' strike is part of a new upsurge of class struggle that has kept France, among other countries, on edge for months.

But the support the strike currently enjoys from the DGB and services union Verdi, as well as from media like the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, must be called hypocritical and cynical. The parties to which these unions and media are close—the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and the Left Party—have helped create and defend the conditions that make this brazen exploitation possible in the first place. Together with their allies in the European Union, they are constantly exacerbating them. In Spain last year, the PSOE/Podemos government mobilized 23,000 police against a nationwide strike by truck drivers.

The allies of the striking truck drivers at the Gräfenhausen-West rest stop are the workers in logistics and in all industries in Germany, Europe and internationally. To make their struggle a success, truck workers must build their own rank-and-file action committees independent of the unions and link up with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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