

Germany: Public Service Action Committee calls for vote against wage cuts and to prepare for an all-out strike

Public Service Action Committee
24 April 2023

Dear colleagues,

The collective bargaining agreement that Verdi reached with the federal and local governments on Saturday evening, and is proposing for approval, means massive cuts in real wages. After maintaining public life under the most adverse working conditions for the last three years, we are now to see cuts in our real wages that are unprecedented in German history.

We therefore call on you to vote “no” in the membership ballot and to contact us. We are building the Public Service Action Committee to prepare for a genuine all-out strike and to take away Verdi’s negotiating mandate. This is the only way we can defend our wages and fight for decent working conditions.

We are organising an online meeting on Tuesday, May 2 at 8 p.m. to discuss this with fellow public service workers. The link to the meeting will be posted here.

The current contract outcome is nothing short of a provocation. Faced with inflation of at least 20 percent in energy and food and exploding rents, we are not to receive any increase in our basic wages at all until February 2024! The €3,000 “inflation compensation” that we are to receive in monthly instalments is not incorporated in our basic rates and so will not change anything, because prices will not fall again afterwards, while our wages will remain low.

We will not receive the increase in our basic rates until March 2024, when prices have risen even further. Instead of the €500 or 10.5 percent asked for by Verdi in a twelve-month contract—which would still have been far too little to seriously compensate for inflation—we are now expected to settle for €200 plus

5.5 percent in a 24-month contract. Calculated over twelve months, that is only €170!

Those in the somewhat higher salary groups do not fare any better. Calculated over a 12-month period, some educators would only receive 5.4 percent more pay rather than the 10.5 percent the union demanded. Refuse collectors and nurses on higher pay scales would get just 5.8 percent.

Verdi boss Frank Werneke found it visibly difficult to talk up these massive cuts in real wages. So difficult, in fact, that he even celebrated the employers’ decision not to implement nominal wage cuts at many hospitals in the midst of high inflation as a great success. As if any representative of the union or of the federal and state governments would even have dared to do so in person in our hospitals!

The result is a slap in the face for public service workers. In the last three years, we have provided patient care in run-down hospitals with far too few staff, we have maintained city cleansing and public transport under pandemic conditions, and we are confronted with growing misery and despair in the job centres or youth welfare offices. And now we are to be thanked for this with massive cuts in our real wages. This will further aggravate the personnel situation and push public services towards collapse.

Cutting our wages is a deliberate political decision. While it is said there is no money for us, in March alone military aid to Ukraine was almost quintupled from €3 billion to €15 billion. Not only are some €100 billion from the special fund available for the German army, but military budgets are continuously increasing. Hundreds of billions also went to the large corporations and super-rich during the pandemic. The current public

sector pay deal, on the other hand, will cost the federal government less than five billion euros!

Billions for the rich and for war, on the one hand and wage cuts for us nurses, educators and refuse collectors on the other. That is the policy behind this new contract.

If we want to defend ourselves against it, we must unite independently in the Public Service Action Committee and remove the negotiating mandate from Verdi. This is because the union in collaborating with the government and corporations and supports this policy. The contract negotiations were a set-up intended to prevent us from conducting an all-out strike.

The negotiators are all dyed-in-the-wool social democrats. Verdi boss Werneke has been a member of the SPD for over 40 years. On the “opposite side” sat two Social Democrats, Gelsenkirchen Mayor Karin Welge for the municipalities and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser for the federal government. These three and their respective entourages are not negotiating; they are jointly discussing how to push through cuts in real wages against us.

As early as last autumn, when the Ukraine war and the pandemic were driving up inflation, all the main German unions, corporate representatives, and the coalition government under Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) agreed on a joint approach. The “inflation compensation” payments agreed in the Concerted Action at the time were not intended to compensate for the wage losses in 2021 and 2022—we would be completely left out in the cold there—but to make up slightly for the low increases in basic wages in 2023 and 2024. This is exactly what the unions then did, and now Verdi is doing the same for us.

Verdi now wants to make us believe that a full strike would be of no use and that no more can be achieved. In view of the horrendous expenditures on rearmament this is obvious nonsense. Rather, Verdi supports the policy of war and social cuts and is therefore itself against organising any serious strike action. The isolated warning strikes only served to prevent genuine strike action.

But just such an all-out strike is necessary to defend our rights. It would inspire and motivate the employees at Deutsche Post, where Verdi has just prevented a strike against the declared will of their members, on the railways and in many other areas. It would undoubtedly

meet with the support of the vast majority of the population and prompt a broad movement against the policy of cuts and war.

Our strike would be part of a movement that is developing throughout Europe. In France, millions are demonstrating against Macron’s pension cuts; in Britain, hundreds of thousands are striking against wage cuts and strike bans; and important strikes have occurred and are occurring in Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The most important task is to turn these struggles into a conscious European movement directed against the enrichment of the super-rich and rearmament.

This is exactly what Verdi wants to prevent and is therefore ready to sabotage our strike, as it did before with postal workers. That is why we call on you to join the Public Service Action Committee to prepare a strike independently of Verdi. For those colleagues who are members of Verdi, we call on you to vote “no” in the membership ballot and to closely monitor the voting process.

We will contact workers in other industries and other countries to build a broad and powerful movement from below. We are organizing our meeting on May 2 at 8 p.m. together with colleagues from the Postal Action Committee, who will talk about their experiences. And we invite guests from other European countries. You can find the link to the meeting, which you can also attend anonymously, here. Send a Whatsapp message to the following number: +491633378340.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact