

Warning strikes in Germany's public transport: Form action committees and join the SGP!

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
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On Friday, two days before the federal election, thousands of public transport workers took strike action in eight federal states: Baden-Württemberg, Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

These warning strikes must be made the starting point for the mobilization of all workers against the incoming government. This is because the parties represented in the Bundestag (parliament) are currently preparing attacks on jobs, wages and social benefits on a scale not seen since the end of the Second World War.

The “new era” in foreign and military policy is being followed by a new era in labor and social policies. All the establishment parties are keeping quiet about this because they agree on this issue. They are all determined to squeeze hundreds of billions of euros out of working people for rearmament and war, while at the same time reducing taxes and levies on corporations and the rich. Hence the dishonest election campaign with its anti-refugee agitation and law-and-order demagoguery.

The reaction of the German ruling class to the ruthless imperialist policies of the US administration under Donald Trump is also to push rearmament and dictatorship. Politicians and “experts” are competing with their proposals and specific spending figures on how the German military should be strengthened.

Newsweekly *Der Spiegel* writes that the time has come for “impositions” to pay for the hundreds of billions for rearmament and war. This would “mean less government spending on things like a welfare payments, housing, pensions or wind turbines.”

Those protesting on the streets Friday and striking for decent wages will be the first to feel the effects of this. As with many other privatized municipal public sector operations, the contracts in western German states are linked to the collective agreement covering public services at federal and municipal levels (TVÖD), which Verdi is currently negotiating with the outgoing federal government and municipal employers.

Employers’ representatives at the federal and municipal

levels did not even table an offer in the second contract bargaining round on Monday and Tuesday. They want to delay negotiations and impose brutal cuts after the election. The already unbearable workloads facing most employees in municipal utilities and public services, libraries, public swimming pools, local authorities and offices is being further worsened by understaffing, dilapidated infrastructure and a lack of digitization.

While the number of billionaires is constantly increasing, schools are being starved of funds, hospitals are being closed, daycare centers are not being built; the rail system, roads, bridges, the entire public infrastructure, as well as the environment, education, housing and science are being left to decay. The 8 percent wage increase demanded by Verdi for the approximately 2.6 million municipal employees and 370,000 federal employees in the public sector would be just a drop in the ocean.

And Verdi does not even intend to push through its own demands. The union is seeking to isolate and separate the token strikes, even in the areas and sectors where Verdi itself represents staff, such as the postal service and public sector. The warning strikes are just to let off steam and are not intended to mobilize and demonstrate workers’ power but to divide and suppress this fighting strength.

While the high level of participation in the strikes reflects the militancy of many workers, Verdi officials are acting as an extension of the federal and local governments with the aim of suppressing resistance.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) calls for the formation of independent rank-and-file action committees to break the control of the Verdi apparatus. The more than justified anger must be transformed into a conscious political offensive by the entire working class to enforce the demands of the workers and defend their interests.

The next federal government, regardless of its composition, will attack all social and democratic gains as soon as it takes office, in order to finance its rearmament and war policy. Developments in the US show what workers can expect here as well.

Trump is the repulsive product of a ruling class that will stop at nothing to pursue its profit interests, lashing out wildly and plunging the whole of society into disaster. In Germany, the ruling class is also preparing to push through its agenda of militarism and social austerity through brutal and authoritarian means.

That is why the real social problems—employment, economic and social issues, peace and justice, climate change and healthcare—are not the subject of the election campaign but only war propaganda and anti-refugee agitation. The fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) is being built up deliberately to suppress the growing opposition.

Because one thing is clear: Millions of people will not accept the coming attacks and will take to the streets against them. But the protests and strikes must be conducted independently of the trade union bureaucracy, which is completely on the side of the government and the corporations.

Verdi is the best example of this. The union explicitly supports the government's pro-war policy. Verdi's 2023 federal congress, which was opened by Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrat, SPD), backed the arms deliveries to Ukraine and the €100 billion "special fund" for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces). Verdi leader Frank Werneke (SPD) even doubted that this money was enough, making it clear that he favored even higher military spending.

Along with the other main trade union officials, Werneke had previously visited the Federal Chancellery to discuss how the costs of militarization could be passed on to the workers in the corporatist collaboration of business, government and the unions known as "Concerted Action." This is where the idea of the so-called "inflation compensation payments" came from. These were then used as a sop to help the trade union apparatus push through enormous cuts in real wages.

When Werneke, a member of the SPD for decades, meets with the representatives of the federal and municipal governments for the third round of negotiations on March 14, the aim will be to intensify this agenda. Federal Interior Minister Nancy Faeser represents the federal government as employer, and the mayor of Gelsenkirchen, Karin Welge, represents the VKA (Association of Municipal Employers' Organizations). Both are, like Werneke, members of the SPD, who support the policies of Chancellor Scholz and have been working hand in hand for years to push through austerity measures against the working class.

The SGP opposes this common front of the establishment parties, trade unions and corporations. In its election statement, it declares:

To defend jobs, wages and rights, workers must organize independently of the trade union bureaucracy and unite internationally. We call for the establishment of action committees that are controlled by and

responsible only to the rank-and-file. These committees must defend every job at all locations as a matter of principle and reject any concessions on wages and social benefits.

Such action committees must be built up throughout the public sector, the postal service, the railways and local public transport—as has already happened at Berlin's public transit operator BVG. They must bring together the current and future strikes and make contact with workers in the automotive and component supply industry, mechanical engineering, the steel and chemical industries and all other sectors that are facing similar attacks and mass layoffs.

Action committees must not be limited just to workplaces. In the neighborhoods, schools and universities, they must take up the defense of social institutions, from libraries, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, sports facilities, youth and senior citizen facilities, nurseries, schools and universities.

They must also take responsibility for defending refugees and migrant workers, who are being scapegoated for the social misery by the all-pervasive anti-immigrant agitation.

The politically independent organization of the working class is crucial. The central instrument for this is the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), founded by the SGP and the International Committee of the Fourth International to develop and coordinate workers' struggles across all borders.

In this, the fight against war, fascism and social cuts is inextricably linked to the struggle against capitalism. The SGP stands for a socialist program to transform society in the interests of the working class. The billionaires, big banks and corporations must be expropriated, and their wealth used to finance healthcare, education and secure, well-paid jobs and adequate pensions.

We call on all workers who do not want to pay with their jobs and wages for war, fascism, exploitation and misery to join the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and support our struggle.



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