

# Break through Verdi union's stalling tactics at Berlin transit provider BVG! Prepare an indefinite strike!

Transport Workers Action Committee  
5 March 2025

Brothers and sisters,

Verdi's stalling tactics—a mixture of warning strikes and negotiations—are aimed at preparing a sellout at BVG. Even the latest strike threat by the bargaining committee, which was labelled an ultimatum, served only to secure a further negotiating date. Management agreed immediately, and Verdi agreed to refrain from further warning strikes until 12 March.

After the last negotiations Verdi already signaled its willingness to accept a contract term of 30 months instead of 12. It described the offer of a monthly pay rise of €225 instead of the €750 demanded as a “step in the right direction.”

Verdi's leadership is closely linked to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the governing party in the Senate (Berlin state legislature) and the federal government. The same applies to its negotiating committee, headed by Jeremy Arndt, deputy chairman of the BVG supervisory board. These forces want at all costs to defeat our demand for a general pay rise of €750 per month over a 12-month period.

Above all, Verdi wants to prevent us from organising an indefinite strike to win this demand. It fears that such principled industrial action would be the prelude to a broad mobilisation of public sector workers and the entire working class against falling real wages and the government's pro-war policy.

There is a direct link between our current industrial dispute and the rapid changes in world politics. At the same time the negotiations began in January, Donald Trump moved back into the White House. Since then, the global situation has changed dramatically. Trump is making good on his threats, imposing protective tariffs, laying off hundreds of thousands of public sector employees, intensifying the trade war, holding talks with Putin and threatening to end NATO.

European governments are responding in sheer horror. For decades, they have pursued their imperialist interests side by side with the US, but now Washington is treating them as rivals and opponents.

In Germany, in particular, calls for military rearmament and European leadership are taking on hysterical dimensions. The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), who emerged as the strongest party in February's federal election, and the SPD are

planning to pass a new “special fund for the Bundeswehr” (Armed Forces) totaling €300 billion or even €400 billion in the outgoing Bundestag (parliament). They lack the necessary two-thirds majority to do this in the new Bundestag. The huge rearmament programme is to be financed by massive cuts in all social areas. Leading politicians are calling for the “courage to take unpopular measures.”

In foreign policy, the ruling class is focusing on rearmament and building up the military force, declaring de facto war on nuclear powered Russia and supporting the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza. In domestic policy, it favours social cuts and class confrontation. The two are inextricably linked.

Verdi explicitly supports this pro-war policy. At its last federal congress in September 2023, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) delivered the opening speech and justified the arms deliveries to Ukraine and the initial €100 billion “special fund” for the Bundeswehr. But Verdi leader Frank Werneke (SPD) did not think that was sufficient, doubting whether the money was enough. He made it clear that he was in favour of even higher military spending.

At the beginning of the First World War in 1914, the trade unions supported the Kaiser's war loans and recruited workers for the war. After Hitler came to power in 1933, the trade unions called on workers to march under the swastika flag on 1 May 1933 and offered Hitler their cooperation, which did not stop him from smashing the unions. Again today, the trade unions are unreservedly on the side of the government and its pro-war policy.

At the same time, they fulfill a very specific task with their bloated apparatus. They strive to suppress any serious industrial action and allow resistance to fizzle out in isolated, temporary and therefore ineffective warning strikes and protests. Anyone who resists is denounced, bullied, threatened and, if necessary, dismissed.

This is not only the case with Verdi. The IG Metall union has agreed to 35,000 job losses and drastic wage cuts at VW. Anyone who rebels against this is subjected to intimidation and silenced.

Here, at the BVG, the mafia-like structures of the Verdi

apparatus are clearly evident. Any opposition is mercilessly fought and suppressed.

The Transport Workers Action Committee has fundamental differences with the staff council group “Kraft durch Basis” (KdB—Power through the Base). But the way in which Verdi, in close cooperation with management, is acting against this group contradicts elementary democratic principles and is completely unacceptable.

When a KdB spokesperson criticised Verdi’s agreement on the contract a year ago and organised an online vote against it, which quickly gained several thousand supporters, the opposition was fiercely attacked. A short time later, when KdB published a graphic showing an athlete waiting for the starting gun with the caption, “Verdi didn’t hear the shot,” several Verdi officials pressed charges. They claimed to feel personally threatened and management instantly issued a dismissal notice.

When staff council elections were held shortly afterwards, Verdi lost its majority to KdB in one of BVG’s two bus divisions, BO-Nord. But Verdi did not accept the employees’ vote. Its PR members boycotted every attempt by KdB to improve shift schedules and other working conditions in the interests of the bus drivers, refused to cooperate with KdB, and finally resigned, along with all substitute members. This forced new elections to be slated for the coming weeks.

In the staff council elections in autumn, Verdi had hoped to use the collective bargaining campaign as an election manoeuvre. For the first time, it brought forward the announcement of its demands by several weeks and, based on an employee survey, set them relatively high. At the same time, it spread the word that these demands could be realised only through strike action and that only Verdi members would be entitled to financial support during the strike.

A short time later, Verdi announced that it had won over a thousand new members with this manoeuvre. Now it is trying to win a re-run of the PR ballot with the help of the new and re-joined members.

But all these manoeuvres are doomed to failure. Verdi’s real role as an agent of management and the government is becoming more and more obvious every day.

At the same time, the past few months have shown that the “Kraft durch Basis” group is no alternative. Its disdain for political questions and its call for everyone to be welcome on its election slate means that it tolerates far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) members and right-wing views in its ranks. This disarms workers and renders them unable to counter Verdi’s attacks.

In order to break through Verdi’s control, it is necessary to systematically build up the Transport Workers Action Committee, which is now becoming ever more important.

In the staff council election campaign in November we wrote:

We are running in these elections to build new

fighting structures that will enable us, rank-and-file transport workers, to intervene directly in workplace disputes.

Our goal is to develop the great strength and power that we have as workers. We want to strengthen the self-confidence of those who keep the city and the country moving. We are not supplicants or beggars. We have rights!

And we know that a joint struggle of all transport workers would paralyze the capital in no time and receive great support from the population.

The organisation of the Transport Workers Action Committee is the first important step towards wresting control from Verdi and taking into our own hands the preparation of an indefinite strike to win our demands.

Verdi’s blackmail that only those who are members of Verdi will receive strike pay will collapse the moment we take the initiative ourselves and elect our own strike leadership made up of those who are willing to fight and who are trustworthy. This is because such a step is the beginning of a rebellion against the Verdi apparatus. Many ordinary Verdi members will take part in this in order to snatch the strike coffers away from the corrupt union functionaries, who are lining their pockets with paid time off and by sitting on company supervisory boards.

A lot has changed since the start of our contract bargaining campaign in January. The government, which determines the behavior of the BVG board, is openly at war both internally and externally.

This turning point also applies to us. We are no longer prepared to put up with Verdi’s stalling tactic of a few isolated warning strikes while the union colludes with management in the negotiations.

We oppose the policies of military rearmament and the enrichment of the wealthy with the longstanding socialist principle of the labour movement: Our needs as workers and the needs of the entire population stand higher than the profit interests of investors, speculators and warmongers.

- Stop the planned Verdi sellout!
- Come to the next online meeting of the Transport Workers Action Committee!
- Prepare an indefinite strike!

Come to our online meetings, where we will discuss further concrete steps!

*Send a Whatsapp message to +4917641685811 to get in touch, and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok.*



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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