

Verdi union leadership supports German government's pro-war agenda: Build independent rank-and-file action committees!

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For weeks now, the warning strikes and protests in the public sector have shown the great anger and willingness to fight that is building up in the working class. Airports, nurseries and hospitals, city cleaning and waste collection, culture, local transport and administration are on strike—sometimes for several days.

It is not only rampant staff shortages, poor pay and growing work pressure that are driving thousands of care workers, refuse collectors, bus drivers, nursery school teachers, airport workers and academics onto the streets. Increasingly, it is also the gigantic rearmament programme that the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) have just agreed in Berlin.

Nuremberg nursing staff wrote: “500 billion for us instead of for armaments” on a placard. A Frankfurt tram driver asked: “Why is there only money for armaments, not for us?”

The anger is more than justified. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) propose making the warning strikes the starting point for a broad mobilisation of the entire working class. This requires the establishment of independent rank-and-file action committees in all workplaces, which establish contact with workers elsewhere, in other sectors and other countries, in order to conduct the struggle against war and social austerity together.

Above all, such committees, which should be made up of ordinary workers, must free themselves from the paralysing control of the service sector trade union Verdi. Because unlike working people, who do not want war, Verdi fully supports the pro-war course and the financial plans of the coming federal government, a grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD.

Verdi and the dbb civil servants' union are currently in the third round of negotiations on the new public service contract (TVöD). In Potsdam, Verdi Chairman Frank Werneke and his deputy Christine Behle are sitting behind closed doors with Karin Welge, the representative of the local authorities, and Nancy Faeser, the current federal interior minister. All four are long-standing members of the SPD.

The federal co-chairs of the SPD, Saskia Esken and Lars

Klingbeil, who are about to enter the new coalition government with Friedrich Merz (CDU), are also (or were) Verdi members. Together with the CDU/CSU, they have decided on the largest rearmament programme of all time, which provides for a “special fund” of €500 billion from loans and further unlimited sums in the billions for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces). Nancy Faeser is also taking part in the coalition negotiations at the same time as the wage negotiations.

One thing is clear: the massive loans can only be serviced and financed if the attacks on public sector employees (and on the working class as a whole) are significantly intensified. A low-wage settlement like the one at Deutsche Post a fortnight ago, which provides for a reduction in real wages, is just the beginning.

The Verdi leadership supports the government's pro-war programme. Its role is to disguise the programme and ultimately to push it through against the working class.

In an interview on such “special funds” on the Verdi website, union chairman Frank Werneke trivialises and justifies the war loans with the words:

The USA's promise of protection towards Europe has become shaky. Against this background, discussions about higher defence spending in Germany and Europe are understandable. Europe must be able to defend itself and the Bundeswehr must be operational.

He describes the additional €500 billion infrastructure programme as a “real opportunity,” saying, “Such a special fund is a real opportunity to clear the investment backlog in our country.”

This is pure eyewash: the infrastructure “special fund” is in no way intended to “clear the investment backlog,” which manifests itself in dilapidated schools, overburdened hospitals or public transport that have been cut to the bone. Not to mention raising wages and conditions in the public sector.

The precedent for this “special fund” is the construction of

the autobahn (motorway) in the 1930s, which Adolf Hitler undertook in preparation for the Second World War. In a similar way, the billions being approved today are to be used to make bridges and roads fit for armoured vehicles, to upgrade IT structures for warfare with drones and to beef up the German armed forces and secret services. This is the kind of “infrastructure” that the CDU/CSU and SPD are striving for.

Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) has called for society to become “war-ready.” This will also include the reintroduction of military conscription; and the government will not stop at seeking nuclear armament. The gigantic scale of the programme alone reveals that it is not aimed at defence, but at preparing for war and world war.

As far as Verdi is concerned, it has already proven in the past that it supports and helps organise rearmament. At its 2023 federal congress, the union joined forces with the government’s pro-war policy and backed the escalation of the war in Ukraine and rearmament in its key motion.

In July 2022, shortly after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Verdi boss Werneke participated in Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s “Concerted Action,” which assured big business that wages would remain low despite inflation. The result was the 2023 contract agreement in the public sector, which provided for cuts in real wages and job losses. Today, half a million posts in the public sector remain unfilled.

In the factories, Verdi’s behaviour is no different to that of IG Metall, which is actively supporting the conversion of Waggonbau Görlitz, which makes locomotives and rolling stock, to arms production. At German airports, where Verdi acts as the in-house union for operator Fraport and national carrier Lufthansa, it has for years supported the conversion of Lufthansa Technik into a service provider for the air force.

This reorientation of society as a whole towards war is the deeper reason why the public employers at federal and local level have simply refused to make any offer at all in the wage dispute for months. Even before the February elections, savings totalling billions were planned everywhere. The union’s demands “don’t fit in at all at this time,” declared Karin Welge, the mayor of Gelsenkirchen, who is negotiating on behalf of the Association of Municipal Employers (VKA).

Verdi’s demands have been known since October 2024. Officially, the union is demanding 8 percent more pay, with at least €350 more per month, higher bonuses for particularly stressful jobs, three more days off per year and €200 more per month for trainees and interns—all urgently needed improvements, although if they were to come, they would only be a drop in the ocean.

But as long as the contract bargaining battle is left to Verdi, they will not materialise. Verdi will sell out the struggle and do everything in its power to prevent an indefinite all-out strike. And that means that great dangers loom: the threat of war, the threat to our migrant brothers and sisters through marginalisation and deportation and also the threat of social

impoverishment and the destruction of social life as a whole. This directly affects the public sector, state schools, the health and education system, the railways, the supply and development of cities, housing construction, the environment and science.

Around 2.6 million public employees depend on the TVöD wage agreement, and it affects a further 370,000 federal employees and almost 600,000 pension recipients. The warning strikes have shown the great potential and willingness to fight in practically all areas, but Verdi is only conducting these token warning strikes to prevent an indefinite strike. The warning strikes serve to release pressure and “let off steam,” to prevent an explosion.

The potential of the working class can only be realized if workers take the fight out of the hands of the union. That is the purpose of the action committees. These rank-and-file committees are based on two principles:

- First, the needs of workers and their families must take precedence over the profit interests of the stock market locusts and their lackeys, government politicians and union officials.
- Secondly, the struggle is an international struggle. Workers’ allies are not the highly paid Verdi functionaries, and certainly not the federal government or the local mayors, senators and magistrates. Their allies are the international working class who keep the public sector running across Europe and around the world.

Workers in Europe are under just as much pressure as they are here. In France, the UK, Austria and other countries, public sector workers are also fighting against the austerity and war budgets of governments that are all preparing for war.

The most blatant example is currently the situation in the United States, where thousands of our colleagues in federal workplaces, the health service, schools, etc., are losing their jobs and livelihoods. The entire working population is under attack by Trump’s secretary of “Government Efficiency,” multibillionaire fascist Elon Musk, who wants to cut the US federal budget by a staggering \$2 trillion.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei are calling on public sector workers everywhere to confront the attacks on their conditions, wages and jobs, to unite and make contact with each other to prepare for mass action, including general strike action. This must be done independently of trade unions such as Verdi, which are deeply hostile to a socialist and internationalist perspective.

Join the fight for action committees. Get in touch via WhatsApp to the mobile number +49 163-3378 340 or register right here using the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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