

Berlin Transport workers strike: No to arbitration! Force the Verdi union to organize an all-out strike!

Transport Workers Action Committee
26 March 2025

Colleagues,

Our wage struggle has reached a critical point. The Berlin Transport Company (BVG) management, Economics Senator Franziska Giffey (Social Democratic Party, SPD) at the head of the company supervisory board, and the Berlin Senate, led by the Christian Democratic Union and SPD, which will form the next federal government, want to make an example of us. They desperately want to prevent us from organizing an all-out strike to enforce our legitimate demands.

An all out strike would disrupt the current coalition negotiations between the CDU and SPD to form a new government under conditions where both parties have already announced they are planning massive social attacks to finance a program of military rearmament costing billion of euros for war credits already approved.

The aim is to prevent us from conducting a successful industrial dispute and prioritizing our legitimate demands over the profit interests of shareholders and the government's war policy. In view of the fact that there is a simultaneous wage dispute for the 2.4 million public sector workers and a stream of layoffs in the auto and supplier industry, our wage dispute has a signal effect. The government fears that it will be the prelude to broader resistance. That is why they want to force us to accept arbitration and give up most of our demands.

It is important to understand the political dimension of our current struggle. It will then become clear why it is necessary to break with the stalling tactics of the Verdi union and commence an unlimited general strike immediately after a successful strike ballot.

We, the Transport Workers Action Committee, have begun to organize independently and will no longer allow ourselves to be patronized by Verdi officials. We have commenced building our own strike committee made up of fellow colleagues who are genuinely prepared to fight and enforce an all-out strike.

Attend our online meeting at 7 p.m. on March 27, where we will discuss further concrete steps!

Verdi is playing its well-known trick of combining limited "warning strikes" with combative speeches while at the same time holding talks and making agreements with company representatives and politicians regarding arbitration negotiations.

At the end of last week, Manuel von Stubenrauch, Verdi spokesperson in the contract commission, criticized our action committee and claimed that our warning about arbitration negotiations was unfounded. He said that it was not the negotiating partners who brought arbitration into play, but rather the media. Just one day later, it became clear how right we were.

Now Stubenrauch emphasizes that the arbitration process is secondary. The decisive thing is the ballot for an all-out strike. But then, in the next sentence, he says: "Every vote for an unlimited strike... and every day of powerful strike action improves your position at the negotiating table in an arbitration."

Who is Stubenrauch trying to fool? Either the vote is a democratic expression of the will of the majority in favour of an unlimited strike, in which case this decision of the membership must be taken into account and steps taken to organize a full strike. Or the ballot vote is only intended to increase pressure in the negotiations for a settlement. Then it is a reduced to a manoeuvre to prevent a full strike and enforce a bad

deal.

We demand that Stubenrauch and the contract commission take a clear stand and declare that the strike ballot is not a negotiating manoeuvre, but the immediate prelude to an unlimited strike.

At the same time, we call on all our colleagues to use the strike ballot to cast a powerful vote in favour of an all-out strike and to enforce this decision, even in the face of resistance from the Verdi bureaucrats, who will try everything to prevent such a strike.

Otherwise, we face the same scenario that took place at the Post Office two years ago. There, Verdi also called a strike ballot in which 86 percent voted in favour of an unlimited strike. But Verdi refused to organize this strike and instead let a barely modified offer from the employers be voted on again until the result suited them.

The refusal of the Verdi leadership to organize a proper strike is directly related to their support for the government and its war program. In an interview on the government's "special fund" on the union homepage, Verdi chairman Frank Werneke plays down and justifies the war credits with the words:

The US promise of protection for Europe has become shaky. In this context, discussions about higher defence spending in Germany and Europe are understandable. Europe must be able to defend itself, and the Bundeswehr must be operational.

At the last Verdi national congress in September 2023, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) gave the opening speech and justified arms deliveries to Ukraine and a 100 billion euro special fund for the Bundeswehr. Werneke was not satisfied with this. He doubted whether the money was enough and made clear even then that he advocated even higher military spending.

To break the control of Verdi and organize an unlimited strike, it is necessary to systematically build the Transport Workers Action Committee. This is now of the greatest importance.

In the works council (PR) election campaign last November, we wrote:

We are running in these PR elections to build new structures of struggle that will enable us workers to intervene directly in workplace disputes.

Our goal is to develop the great strength and power we have as workers. We seek to strengthen our self-confidence - it is we who keep the city and the country moving. We are not supplicants and beggars, we have rights! And we know that a joint struggle of all transport workers would paralyze the capital city in no time and win considerable public support.

The formation of the transport workers' working group is the first important step in taking the preparation of an unlimited strike to enforce our demands into our own hands.

Since the beginning of our wage struggle in January, much has changed. The government, which determines the behaviour of the BVG board, is openly pursuing a policy of war, both at home and abroad. Its "turning point" also applies to us. We are no longer willing to accept Verdi's stalling tactics of partial strikes and behind our back negotiations. We counter military rearmament and the enrichment of the already rich with the longstanding socialist principle of the labour movement: our needs as workers and the needs of the entire population stand above the profit interests of investors, speculators and warmongers.

- Stop the arbitration!
- Force Verdi to organize an all-out unlimited strike!
- Attend the next online meeting of the Transport Workers Action Committee!

Write a Whatsapp message to +01748402566 to get in touch and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok. Come to this site at 7 p.m. on March 27 and take part in our online meeting.



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