

Berlin transit BVG pay dispute: Verdi union submits to arbitration despite holding strike ballot, we need to prevent a sell-out!

Transport Workers Action Committee
2 April 2025

Dear fellow transit workers,

The political significance of our contract battle is becoming ever clearer. A week ago, we emphasised that management at Berlin transit operator BVG, the Berlin Senate (state executive) and the federal government wanted to set an example. Every effort is being made to prevent us from organising an all-out strike and enforcing our justified wage demands. They do not want the negotiations between the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) to form a new federal government to take place under the pressure of our strike.

Since then, Berlin mayor Kai Wegner (CDU) has spoken out, attacking our last warning strike. He said that further strikes would no longer be acceptable until arbitration had taken place.

Shortly afterwards, former Berlin mayor Eberhard Diepgen (also CDU) also spoke out against our industrial action. This has-been right-wing politician, who was driven out of office by a vote of no confidence in 2001 due to his involvement in the Berlin banking scandal, described our demands as completely unrealistic and called for a restriction on the right to strike. He called for the possibility of strikes going forward to be prevented by compulsory arbitration.

Several employers' associations have also endorsed this demand, describing our warning strikes and the ballot on all-out action as something that must be prevented. The Gesamtmetall engineering employers' association proposed a draft bill for compulsory state arbitration. Warning strikes would be limited to a few hours and should not hinder operations or production processes. Anyone who refuses arbitration would not be allowed to take industrial action.

With our contract bargaining dispute, we are currently at the forefront of the fight in defence of the right to strike. This concerns a fundamental question: do we workers, who produce everything and provide all services to keep society functioning, have the right to strike in order to enforce decent wages and reasonable working conditions? Or do the speculators, billionaires and their politicians have the right to keep lowering wages and increasing exploitation to increase their profits and finance their policies of rearmament and war?

It is an old principle of the labour movement that our right to work and wages is more important than the greed for profit and the economic interests of the super-rich. At the same time, our wage struggle is an important signal in the resistance against war and rearmament. We are not prepared to make sacrifices for the military adventures of a warmongering cabal in the government, the arms industry and the media. Two world wars are enough!

That is why we must achieve a high level of approval in the current ballot and enforce an indefinite all-out strike. But this requires breaking from the control of the Verdi union functionaries and building up the rank-and-file Transport Workers Action Committee.

There are many signs that Verdi is already negotiating a rotten sell-out behind our backs and is prepared to agree to an outcome that has nothing to do with our demands. We would like to remind you once again that our demand for €750 more per month over 12 months is the minimum after years of cuts in real wages.

With the last contract in 2021, wages were gradually increased by 4.5 percent from January 2022. According

to official figures, consumer prices in Berlin have risen by 15 percent in the same period, with real price increases for food, heating and rent being significantly higher still. BVG, the largest public transport company in Europe and in Germany, stands at the bottom of the league when it comes to pay.

Everyone knows that the miserable pay is the main reason why many people no longer want to put up with the stress of driving in Berlin's traffic, full of roadworks, and why the exodus is leading to a constant increase in work stress.

Nevertheless, Verdi is refusing to initiate an indefinite strike after the ballot. The Verdi officials are part of the governing parties, support the policy of rearmament and war and have already made agreements to prevent a full strike with the help of arbitration.

It is very striking that all the previous results of the negotiations were subject to a member consultation before a vote in the bargaining committee. Only in the last and most important negotiation, when the BVG, in an absolutely provocative manner, did not present a new offer but demanded arbitration, was there no member consultation. Why not? Because the majority would have voted against it. Because the vast majority regard the ballot as a prelude to an all-out strike and not as a means of exerting pressure in the conciliation talks.

Verdi also did not organise discussion among members about the arbitration arrangements and the selection of the arbitrators. There has not yet been any conciliation at BVG and therefore no arbitration agreement. Verdi was not forced to adopt the agreement to undergo conciliation from the public sector employers and accept the so-called "industrial peace obligation," i.e., a ban on strikes. It was all voluntary because this is what the Verdi leadership wanted.

The brazen talk from Verdi's head negotiator Jeremy Arndt about "your conciliation," which was organised according to "your ideas," cannot hide the fact that arbitration was pushed through without consultation and against the resistance of many members.

A look at the recent pay agreements in the public sector and at Deutsche Post makes clear what Verdi also has in mind for us. Verdi has agreed to a miserable deal for the 170,000 postal workers, which means further cuts in real wages. With a contract running for

24 months, the first three months of this year see a pay freeze, followed by a 2 percent increase from April 2025 and a further 3 percent from April 2026. Although a clear majority of members (54 percent) voted against the agreement, Verdi pushed it through.

Verdi cynically manipulated various ballot results, so that an approval of 25 percent was sufficient to push through a bad result against the opposition of a majority.

Arndt & Co. want to repeat exactly the same thing at BVG.

It is therefore necessary to break through Verdi's control and impose an indefinite strike after a successful ballot. To achieve this, the establishment of the Transport Workers Action Committee is now of the utmost importance.

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!

The organisation of the Transport Workers Action Committee is the first important step towards preparing an indefinite strike to enforce our demands.

- Halt the arbitration!
- Get in touch with the Transport Workers Action Committee!
- Force Verdi to organise an indefinite all-out strike!

Get in touch with us! Send a Whatsapp message to +01748402566 and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok.



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