

Union sell-out of Berlin Transport workers: Build the Transport Workers' Action Committee!

Transport Workers' Action Committee
8 May 2025

An appeal by the BVG Action Committee:

On April 28, the Verdi bargaining committee announced its acceptance of the arbitration proposal and the end of our wage dispute at the Berlin Transport Company (BVG). This is exactly what the action committee warned against from the start: the public service union Verdi is on the side of the BVG management and is seeking to impose the latter's demands upon us.

The only conclusion to be drawn is that the Transport Workers' Action Committee must now be established so we can represent our interests. Verdi's termination of the contract dispute underlines that nothing can be achieved under the union leadership. New forms of organisation are needed: action committees.

As we have previously explained, Verdi's agreement to convene the arbitration commission was a bureaucratic manoeuvre to prepare another sell-out. In the ballot held until April 4, 95.4 percent of us voted in favour of an indefinite strike. But far from implementing our mandate to prepare a full strike, the Verdi bargaining committee used the arbitration procedure with the sole aim of preventing this indefinite strike.

According to Verdi, 65.1 percent of its members surveyed at the BVG voted in favour of the arbitration result, with 34.9 percent against.

The union speaks of a high turnout, but does not provide any concrete figures. Negotiator Jeremy Arndt claims it was an "honest result" because "almost as many votes were cast as in the strike ballot."

Of the approximately 16,500 BVG employees, around 7,200 are Verdi members. Even under the unrealistic assumption that they all voted, the 65.1 percent approval would correspond to just under 4,700 respondents, i.e., far less than a third of the workforce.

In contrast to the feedback Verdi has provided in the course of this wage dispute, there have been no concrete statements so far about the distribution among the individual

occupational groups in the vote on the arbitration result.

The well-paid Verdi bureaucrats have merely stated that there had been intensive talks between the Verdi leadership and the workforce.

In reality, none of the leading bigwigs showed up at depots—a point colleagues criticised on social media. On the other hand, they were happy to pose for photos with the vice president of the Bundestag and Verdi mediator Bodo Ramelow from the Left Party: "The union: That's us!"

The Verdi officials deployed so-called yard managers, who were given the unpleasant task of glossing over the arbitration result and promoting it. Some colleagues from the driver pool told us that they had great difficulty casting their votes during their shifts because the yard managers who had the ballot boxes with them were not always available. They also complained that there was no fixed location for ballot boxes at every depot and at all times, as had been the case in previous contract negotiations.

Furthermore, it can be assumed that many agreed grudgingly to the final offer because they know that nothing more could be achieved with Verdi. They know that Verdi will not fight, regardless of the outcome of the vote.

Arndt confirmed this: "We know that the approval was not met with great jubilation."

In reality, the anger over the lousy result is enormous. The agreement negotiated by mediators Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) for Verdi and Matthias Platzeck (Social Democratic Party, SPD) for the employers is a sham that barely differs hardly from the previous employer offer—which we rejected by an overwhelming majority in the strike ballot.

The Verdi leadership has once again proven that it, and its bureaucratic apparatus, unreservedly support the economic interests of BVG management and the political agenda of the Berlin state and federal governments.

Arndt himself openly admitted this. In an official statement, he justified his rejection of the full strike and his support for the arbitration result by saying that a strike was

fraught with great uncertainty. This was in view of “a situation where it is clear, also because of the new coalition agreement, that the state has less money available.”

It is false to claim that the federal and state governments do not have “less money.” There is enough money, just not for us. The incoming federal government of the conservative CDU/CSU [the Union] and SPD [Social Democrats], led by former BlackRock boss and millionaire Friedrich Merz, plans to spend a trillion euros on rearming the Bundeswehr, switching to a war economy and militarising society.

In Berlin, the CDU/SPD state government under Kai Wegner (CDU) passed a drastic austerity budget with massive social cuts shortly before our contract negotiations, while at the same time expanding the police apparatus.

Arndt is therefore telling us that we have to pay for rearmament, war and a police state by foregoing adequate wages and salaries. Arndt is not alone in this respect. All the trade union apparatuses support the course of the new federal government. The German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) has expressly praised the government’s coalition agreement, although this agreement marks the beginning of a comprehensive attack on our social standards, the likes of which have not been seen since the end of the Second World War. It includes a tougher law-and-order policy to enforce these cuts, as well as attacks on immigrants in the style of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), based on stirring up nationalism and setting workers against one another.

The financing of trade war measures and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs, with which the Merz government and the economic elite plan to respond to the growing economic crisis and the Trump administration’s trade war, also threaten us and our families with unemployment and impoverishment.

The trade unions see their task in the coming struggles is to keep workers under control and burden us with the costs of rearmament and war. They are trying to suppress any effective measures of struggle against this.

With the help of the trade unions, railway workers were forced to accept a three-year peace obligation and a drastic reduction in real wages, followed shortly afterwards by our colleagues at Deutsche Post. In the public sector, a three-year industrial peace obligation with drastic real wage cuts is also to be imposed on 2.5 million employees based on the ongoing arbitration vote.

And now we have been presented with a result at the BVG that takes us even further down the road of previous real wage cuts. For us, the term of the agreement includes a two-year forfeit of any industrial action.

But the current contract deal is not the end, but only the beginning of the necessary struggle against the union

straitjacket and the subordination of our interests to the profit and war interests of the ruling elite!

The central lesson from this collective bargaining struggle is therefore to strengthen and build up the independent Transport Workers’ Action Committee now.

We in the Action Committee stand for these two principles:

- Our needs as workers come before the profit interests of company management and their political backers, which means reviving the socialist principles of the labour movement. We are the ones who keep public transport running under extremely difficult working conditions.

- We oppose the division of our colleagues according to companies, industries and nations. Our allies are our colleagues at the S-Bahn and Deutsche Bahn, in public service and in industry. That is why we organised a joint meeting with the action committees of the postal service and the public service during our wage dispute.

Like us, our colleagues throughout Europe, in the United States and worldwide are confronted with the same dangers of poverty, war and fascism. That is why we are counting on our close political cooperation with the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

We must prepare ourselves for fierce battles with the federal government, the Berlin Senate and the Verdi apparatus.

The first step is our participation as a Transport Workers Action Committee in the repeat staff council elections. In the staff council election campaign in November, we wrote: “We are standing in these PR elections to build new structures of struggle that will enable us workers to intervene directly in workplace conflicts.” This is now more urgent than ever.

Don’t waste any time, get in touch with us. Call +491748402566 and register using the following form to help build the action committee!



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