

Berlin bus drivers support Transport Action Committee slate for the staff council elections

Carola Kleinert**26 May 2025**

New elections are currently being held for the Staff Council, covering workers at three of the six bus depots of the BVG Berlin transit company. Of the approximately 16,000 BVG employees across Berlin, around 2,100 will now vote again on who should represent their interests on the North Staff Council (BO Nord).

In the last Staff Council elections in November/December last year, the Verdi trade union lost its dominant position at all bus depots. The Kraft durch Basis (KdB, Strength through Grassroots) list took over the chairmanship of the BO Nord council with 9 out of 15 seats. The Verdi union list won only 5 seats and the Verdi splinter group, Liste Klare Kante (Clear Edge), won one seat.

Claiming that cooperation with the KdB in BO Nord was impossible, the Verdi group resigned en masse from the staff council at the beginning of February 2025, thereby forcing the current new elections.

The Transport Workers Action Committee, which is also standing for election again, is calling on our colleagues to make this election a statement of intent against the Verdi union. Only an independent rank-and-file action committee can break Verdi's dominance and place the initiative for the fight for decent wages and working conditions in the hands of the employees.

"The experiences of recent months underscore how urgent it is that we organise ourselves independently. We are standing in the staff council elections to break out of the Verdi straitjacket and build genuine resistance from below," the action committee said in its election appeal on May 13.

In its statements, the Transport Workers Action Committee, which warned of impending betrayal and sellout by Verdi at the start of collective bargaining, has emphasised that the Verdi bureaucrats do not represent the interests of the workforce, but those of BVG management and the state and federal governments behind it.

In fact, last autumn, in preparation for the contract negotiations that began in January 2025, Verdi had presented itself as grassroots, democratic and prepared to strike, emphasising the wage increase of €750, which had been identified as a minimum demand in a survey of its members, as its central goal. Verdi negotiator Jeremy Arndt even spoke of

the need for a "wage increase that compensates for the extreme price increases of recent years."

With the help of this combative stance, Verdi succeeded in recruiting new members, as only union members are entitled to financial strike support during a strike, while all non-members forfeit their entire wage.

But after only four brief warning strikes, Verdi sold out the fighting spirit of the BVG workers, which also include underground and tram drivers, even though 95.4 percent had previously voted in favour of an all-out strike in a ballot.

At the same time as the ballot was being held, the conciliation process began. The union bureaucrats summarily reduced the workers' willingness to fight to a mere "bargaining chip" and negotiated behind closed doors with mediators Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) and Matthias Platzeck (Social Democrat, SPD) to reach an outcome that falls far short of the workers' original demands and does not even begin to compensate for the loss in real wages of recent years.

In recent weeks, members of the action committee and its supporters distributed hundreds of flyers to workers calling for their vote and discussed the situation with outraged colleagues who now reject Verdi even more vehemently after the current sellout.

One bus driver explained why he supports the action committee: "Because it has been obvious for a long time that those who are currently in charge do not care about the concerns of the employees, about my concerns. On the contrary, they [Verdi] are working hand in hand with the employer against the interests of the workforce. The union has long since disqualified itself, so it is high time we showed them the red card, sent them to the substitute bench and brought in someone who can do a better job. The action committee is that someone."

They continued: "We have listened to the numerous excuses from BVG and Verdi for far too long! There's no money? There's always money for everything else, especially for the lavish salaries of the board. But when it comes to paying those who keep the business running, who slave away out there day in, day out, suddenly there's no money?"

Another a bus driver said he would resign his membership of Verdi as a consequence of the miserable wage agreement: "We,

the members, expected more [from the wage negotiations] in view of what Verdi conveyed to us through action and strength. Verdi gained over 1,600 new members by stirring up hope and fear of a full strike. We are the losers, and the winners are Verdi and the employers. I see no reason to remain a member, as I no longer see Verdi as a partner capable of negotiating.”

This bitter experience of not being able to achieve anything with Verdi is shared by BVG employees with their colleagues throughout the public sector, from hospitals to refuse collection and Deutsche Post. But this does not only apply to Verdi.

One of the most important lessons to be learned from these bitter experiences with the trade unions is that they cannot be attributed to individual union bureaucrats, but to the fundamentally changed political conditions.

Already under the old Scholz SPD-led government, and now even more unrestrainedly under the Christian Democrat-led Merz government coalition with the SPD, the war against Russia is being escalated and, with the support of all parties in the Bundestag (parliament), war credits in the trillions are being made available for the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) in order to participate in the struggle for the redivision of the world. Unrestricted support is also continuing for the Netanyahu government in Israel, which is pushing ahead with the fascist “final solution to the Palestinian question.”

Verdi’s renewed betrayal and sellout is part of a comprehensive offensive against jobs, wage levels and social rights, designed to recoup the costs of militarisation and suppress the overwhelming anti-war mood among the population.

That is why the Transport Workers Action Committee emphasises that union bureaucrats everywhere work closely with the corporations and government to systematically slow down, isolate and sell out strikes. As part of the political elite—especially in the SPD and the Left Party—the union officials unreservedly support the war and rearmament policies of the Merz government at federal level and the austerity measures of the Berlin state government.

While Verdi and the Strength through Grassroots, Clear Edge and Offene Liste Nord (Open List North) slates, which are also running in the staff council elections, are trying to ignore these political conditions, Andy Niklaus, spokesperson for the Action Committee, said in his video statement :

Unlike us, all the other list representatives claim that so-called big politics has nothing to do with our workplace concerns. Some even claim that union policy, i.e., collective bargaining agreements, has nothing to do with our workplace concerns.

In doing so, they support the illusion that it is possible for all employees to participate in workplace disputes without the need for a political struggle.

But the Merz government’s statement makes one

thing clear: the German elites want war again! And we are supposed to pay for it!

“We in the action committee,” Niklaus continued, “stand for the basic socialist principle: our needs, the needs of the workers, are more important than the profit interests of the rich and their political backers.”

Quite a few transport workers support the Action Committee’s political assessment.

One explained: “We know that the government under the extreme right-winger Merz wants to invest billions of euros in the war against Russia—a war that the absolute majority of the population does not want. There is money for this, and we are supposed to foot the bill or accept that our wages will be used to pay for it? And in the same way, we are indirectly being asked to foot the bill for the horrific genocide of the Palestinians by Israel, which is unconditionally supported and courted by our corrupt government? I say: No! Not with me! Enough is enough!”

Another also believes that “politicians must be held accountable” for their “warmongering and aiding and abetting genocide.”

And Robert, a former BVG bus driver, supports the action committee “because it is honest and independent in its efforts to represent the interests of the employees. Unlike Verdi, the committee cannot be bought, influenced or controlled by the employer. This is not about power games—this is about us, the employees.”

Robert stressed, “What is particularly important to me is that the action committee does not allow itself to be intimidated by the employer. It fights alongside all our colleagues who are ready to fight for the interests of the workforce. And we discuss the important political issues that are relevant to our struggle for fair working conditions and wages.”



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