

Verdi trade union sells out ancillary workers at Berlin's Charité hospital

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Last week, the trade union Verdi's bargaining committee announced the acceptance of a new contract at Charité Facility Management (CFM). According to the union, 78.1 percent of Verdi members voted in favour of the agreement.

CFM employs around 3,500 people in medical technology, patient transport, building services, cleaning and security. In the current pay dispute, workers had been on strike for 48 days to demand higher wages.

The agreement is a slap in the face to the workforce. It was essentially reached behind closed doors between CFM management, Verdi and the Berlin Senate (state executive).

The settlement supposedly provides for a step-by-step alignment of base salaries with the pay scale of the main public sector collective agreement (TVöD) by 2030. The first adjustment will be applied retroactively from June 1 this year, with full alignment scheduled to be phased in by January 1, 2030. Depending on job role and pay grade, CFM workers' wages could increase by between €200 and €1,000 gross per month by 2030.

Additionally, a single extra day of special leave per half-year has been agreed—but only for Verdi members, up to 2029. This is the union's attempt to prevent mass resignations after the rotten deal and to bind workers to its organisation.

Verdi and their pseudo-left supporters never tire of presenting the outcome as a huge success that supposedly establishes the principle of “equal pay for equal work” at Europe's largest university hospital.

In reality, it does nothing of the kind. The deal cements the outsourcing of the service company and the miserable working conditions.

Back in 2006—nearly 20 years ago—the Berlin state government, then led by the Social Democrats (SPD)

and the PDS (the predecessor of the Left Party), spun off Charité's services division to cut wages and save costs. Various non-medical and non-nursing occupational groups, such as security staff and cleaners, were removed from Charité's main collective agreement and employed by the newly established CFM. Since then, most employees there have earned hundreds of euros less per month than their colleagues paid under the core Charité contract.

Since then, there have been countless strikes and protests. As early as 2011, CFM workers went on strike for more than two months. But Verdi always succeeded in running the strikes into the ground, dividing the workforce at Charité and entrenching low wages.

After the state repurchased the private companies' stakes in CFM in 2019, Verdi concluded the last contract with management and the Senate—contrary to all previous promises, this agreement was not based on the TVöD. It was preceded by a long campaign by the Senate and the unions claiming that wages and working conditions would improve significantly through the buyback.

That agreement, too, had a four-year term. Meanwhile, inflation soared and CFM workers—unlike employees of the parent company—received no compensation for rising prices. Anger and frustration grew accordingly. Verdi was therefore forced into the relatively long strike.

A closer look at the settlement shows it entirely serves the interests of CFM management and the Berlin Senate, today a coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU) and SPD.

The declared aim of the strike—which received over 99 percent support in the ballot—was reintegration of CFM workers into Charité and full inclusion under the terms of TVöD, i.e., full parity with other staff at the

hospital. Verdi deliberately abandoned this goal entirely in the negotiations.

Meanwhile, the CFM in-house collective agreement continues to apply. Even if salaries were fully aligned with the TVöD, there would still be extensive differences. Shift bonuses, special payments, holiday entitlements, pension provisions and other benefits regulated in the main contract will still not apply at CFM. For example, CFM staff will still have to work half an hour more per week than their Charité colleagues.

Even if one looks solely at the pay increases, the deal is anything but a “major step” for the workforce. The scale of wage rises depends, firstly, on future regrading. Although Verdi claims this has been agreed with CFM, no details have been provided about what this will look like in practice or what impact it will have on pay. Secondly, the extremely long duration of the agreement must be considered, along with the fact that CFM workers have already endured years of real-terms pay cuts.

According to *taz*, the phased pay plan is the direct result of an informal agreement within the Senate, whose members also sit on the supervisory board of state-owned Charité. To implement it, the CDU and SPD approved funds—the amount of which has not yet been disclosed.

From the outset, Verdi and the Berlin Senate were primarily concerned with preventing reintegration into Charité and averting further strikes for as long as possible. Under German labour law, the CFM contract effectively includes a no-strike clause for its duration.

This means the Senate and Verdi still hold a lever to keep Charité and CFM workers divided. For 20 years, Verdi has kept the protest at CFM strictly isolated from other Charité workers.

While militarisation is being ramped up at home and abroad, the Berlin state government has recently passed a brutal austerity package providing for massive cuts in all social sectors. There is no doubt that the state-owned hospitals will be among the first affected.

It has already been decided that Charité alone will receive €20.5 million less in state subsidies for teaching and research. In total, around €280 million in cuts in science and healthcare have been planned by the state government.

The CFM deal is therefore designed to suppress

industrial action as much as possible in the coming years. It is no coincidence that Berlin’s Mayor Kai Wegner (CDU) expressed his delight that “a solution has now been found.”

Once again, the Verdi leadership has demonstrated that it and its apparatus of functionaries follow the political directives of the Berlin Senate without reservation. The sell-out at CFM is part of a long series in which the unions have undermined workers’ readiness to fight and subordinated them to the interests of big business and government.

This year, for example, rail and postal workers were forced—again with the unions’ help—into three-year no-strike agreements combined with painful real wage cuts. In the public sector, Verdi pushed through the same measures together with the federal government. Most recently, Verdi in Berlin, working hand in hand with management and the Senate, imposed a disastrous settlement on staff at regional public transit operator BVG.

It is urgently necessary to put a stop to Verdi’s rotten machinations and those of the other unions. To defend jobs, wages and working conditions, workers must organise themselves independently of the unions and link up internationally in rank-and-file action committees.



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