

Hamburg dockworker demands union action against genocide in Gaza

“Verdi’s silence is part of the nightmare”

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The shocking reports of the scale of Israel’s genocide in the Gaza Strip—from the bombing of civilian facilities and the shooting of people seeking aid, to the systematic starvation of small children—have sparked a renewed wave of global protest involving hundreds of thousands.

In Hamburg, a dockworker, Palestinian Mohammed Alattar, has spoken out. He had approached the public service union Verdi, which claims to represent “the interests of employees.” Verdi traditionally negotiates wages and working conditions for millions of workers in ports, airports, railways, public transport and other public services.

In all these sectors, workers are prepared to take action against the genocide and boycott German arms shipments to Israel, but the union refuses to lift a finger. Verdi stands firmly behind the Social Democratic Party (SPD), in a coalition with the Christian Democrats (CDU) in the Merz-led government. This not only supplies Israel with weapons and money, but it also makes this a “matter of state policy” and bans and punishes any resistance to the genocide.

Mohammed Alattar, who has lost 80 family members in the Gaza massacre, writes in a petition addressed to Verdi that he approached the union leadership with his story and asked what the union was doing in answer. He described the response with anger: “Nothing came back, no chance. Only complete ignorance and silence.”

This disregard for the suffering and catastrophe in Gaza, Alattar writes, “reflects the same disregard and isolation that Jewish people in Germany experienced 80 years ago.”

In his petition to Verdi, Alattar recounts the experiences he has had as a Palestinian from Gaza. He arrived in Germany in 2015, and continues:

In 2023, I completed my vocational training in the port of Hamburg and have since been employed on a permanent basis and a member of the Verdi union. In 2023, I went home to Gaza for the first and last time since arriving in Germany. On February 6, 2024, the Israeli occupation army murdered my brother Abood. He was 33 years old, married, and left behind three children. In early May 2024, the Israeli occupation army levelled my family’s house in the Gaza Strip to the ground. All my musical instruments, my father’s library (with more than 5,000 books), all our photos and memories—everything is gone.

I have lost over 80 members of my family and more than 130 of my friends, neighbours and former colleagues. Since then, my parents have endured the horror of destruction, loss and physical and mental illness, caused by the Israeli occupation army. Through these acts of aggression, 90 percent of my entire life before 2015 has been damaged and wiped out: people, streets, paths, places, property. ...

Alattar writes that it became clear to him “what an important role, responsibility and political and social position a union holds,” and describes his initiatives in which he reached out to Verdi six months earlier, in

February 2025. He shared his horrific experiences and demanded that the union take action—“But nothing came back ...”

From this, Alattar concludes:

The disregard for my suffering by Verdi and its silence in the face of the catastrophes I personally experience, and which my people and the rest of my family experience every day, reflects the same disregard and isolation that Jewish people in Germany experienced 80 years ago. Then, as now, there is silence. The stories are similar, perhaps the names, dates, details and interests differ, but the catastrophe, its causes, and the factors that led to its emergence and continuation are the same.

Here, in a country that should have learned from history, history is ignored and suppressed. This country, which more than any other should have learned from its past, continues to repeat the mistakes of history—in a different form, but with the same consequences. I am aware that the silence, disregard and isolation I am experiencing today resembles what a Jewish, exhausted man had to endure in Hamburg 80 years ago.

He concludes, “I know that the silence of my union Verdi is part of this nightmare. It is complicity, collaboration and support.” He states that he will continue “to take to the streets, to raise my voice, and to fight this disregard, this racism, and the discrimination I have experienced from my union.”

Alattar has touched a raw nerve and spoken an essential truth: the tacit, and sometimes explicit, cooperation of the public service union with the Merz government’s war policy and the genocide is a key reason for the current paralysis and confusion in the working class.

Verdi has openly aligned itself with the government. At its last congress in September 2023, when it dealt with the question of war policy, Verdi’s main resolution supported the enormous military build-up and specifically endorsed arms deliveries to Ukraine. Verdi chairman Frank Werneke described them as

“legally legitimate” and “necessary.”

Verdi’s leadership has not publicly criticised Israel’s arms shipments even once since October 2023.

As late as March 2025 (long after he had received Alattar’s letter), Werneke defended the government’s €1 trillion rearmament programme, intended to turn Germany into a major military power, on the Verdi website with the words: “The security promise of the United States to Europe has become shaky. Against this background, discussions about higher defence spending in Germany and Europe are understandable. Europe must be able to defend itself; the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces] must be operational.”

At the same time, Verdi accepted cuts in real wages during collective bargaining negotiations in the public service, public transport and at DHL Deutsche Post, thereby paving the way for workers to bear the costs of the massive military escalation.

The trade union bureaucracy, as well as that of IG Metall and all the other unions affiliated to the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) is an integral part of the German state apparatus. Only through an open struggle against it can the necessary working class resistance to the war policy of the CDU-SPD coalition be developed.

Mohammed Alattar told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Since this experience with Verdi, I have decided to go public myself and to gather allies, union organisations and groups, to carry out this fight—this campaign—also against Verdi.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is fighting to build independent rank-and-file action committees in the ports, at the airports, on the railways, and in the arms industry, in order to coordinate resistance. These will link up with workers around the world to stop war and genocide. An international boycott will develop as part of the social revolution that will finally overcome capitalism itself, the root cause of war, fascism, and genocide.



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