

Verdi union agrees sell-out contract for Germany's federal state workers

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Verdi has agreed a new contract covering the public service of the federal states, which can only be described as a slap in the face for its members. The union is in the process of selling out all contract struggles—including those in local public transport—and enforcing cuts in real wages, so that the insane pro-war policy of the federal government can be financed.

Under conditions of workers growing willingness to fight, and anger over the constant social attacks, there can be only one answer to this: the building of independent rank-and-file Action Committees in all sections of the working class to organise a nationwide strike movement against social cuts and war.

The result had been determined for a long time. It lies far below the already modest demands for a 7 percent wage increase and at least €300, with a one-year contract term: Only 5.8 percent was decided, distributed in three steps (2.8 percent from April 1, 2026; 2 percent from March 1, 2027; 1 percent from January 1, 2028) with a total term of 27 months. In other words: The first increase will not be paid out until this April, after a pay freeze of five months (!). This is only just above the official inflation rate of 2.2 percent. However, as is well known, price increases for petrol, food and rent burden working class households significantly more than average households, and the official inflation rate in no way reflects this.

Even the shift allowances, which Verdi is now highlighting, which are to rise by €100 monthly (to €200 for rotating shifts and to €250 in hospitals), are by no means compensation for the labor these workers perform. These are largely gross amounts that will be taxed and hardly make a dent in the end. While the public sector continues to be cut to the bone, the workforce who keep social life running every day are supposed to accept cuts in real wages again.

The resulting new contract is practically the same as arbitration produced for federal government and municipal employees last year, only it is even worse in many respects. Back then, there was an additional day off for everyone, which will not apply for state employees. The negotiator for the states, Andreas Dressel, a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and finance senator (state minister) from Hamburg, told *Handelsblatt*: “An additional free day, an additional vacation day, that would not have fit into these times.” As the

WSWS has already written: “Everyone knows that Verdi will in the end nod through a deal that lies significantly below [demands].”

The predictable contract negotiations in Potsdam already made a mockery of the membership. After the Verdi leadership had spent days behind closed doors with their party colleagues from the SPD, Verdi boss Frank Werneke (SPD) appeared “sleep-deprived” before the cameras and claimed that the negotiations had been “more difficult than for a long time.” And the press adopted the Verdi version of a “four-day negotiation marathon” and of tough negotiations lasting days and nights.

In reality, the negotiating partners—Verdi executive members Frank Werneke and Christine Behle on the one hand and Chairman of the Collective Bargaining Association of German Federal States (TdL) Andreas Dressel on the other—have known each other for many years. As long-standing SPD members, they watch the backs of their party in the federal government coalition—especially Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Labour Minister Bärbel Bas. For decades, they have supported the federal government’s policies of militarisation and austerity.

Precisely in the current situation, the deal speaks volumes about the role Verdi plays. Germany is currently witnessing a broad mobilisation by various sections of the working class, where not only kindergarten teachers, nursing staff, garbage collectors, forestry workers and employees in administrative offices, local authorities and universities have demonstrated their willingness to take action in numerous warning strikes, but bus and tram drivers, train drivers, pilots and flight attendants are also engaged in industrial action. Under these conditions, by signing the contract for public service workers, the Verdi leadership has effectively agreed a no-strike clause lasting 27 months, until January 31, 2028.

This is producing growing discontent among workers, which a WSWs reporting team was able to experience on Tuesday, February 10, at the warning strike in Mainz. At a rally of about 1,500 employees at the Alte Postlager behind the main railway station, workers from universities and state agencies spoke out clearly in favour of a broad movement and against dividing the workforce. Several university graduate employees explained

that they had finally expected to receive reasonable, respectful treatment. “We shape society, our work is important,” said a biologist. “We should really be paid better.” But this is not part of the new contract. As Werneke declared, they had “not succeeded in achieving separate collective bargaining protection for the 300,000 student employees.”

Many showed themselves ready to take up a real fight for better wages and conditions and against the attacks on the 8-hour day. Some expressly rejected the policy of division and sell-out by Verdi, like a bioinformatics scientist from Gutenberg University, who rejected the “conscious power politics” of Verdi. He said, “Strikes are important, people must come together and create a counter-pole to enforce any demands at all, which is hardly possible anymore. Verdi separated us from each other cunningly, a long time ago already, so that the lever is so small that we can no longer achieve anything.”

Many saw the larger framework within which the cuts and war preparations are unfolding, and while a Verdi official tried to argue for more rearmament citing “Putin’s unprovoked war of aggression,” a doctoral student from Gutenberg University said, “No, we must stand up against war. When the first nuclear bomb is in the air, it is too late.” Another grad student said, “Rearmament is there to rebuild the economy. It does not benefit the little man. Ninety percent of people—also in Ukraine, also in Russia, also in the USA—do not want war at all, and we could all live together contentedly. But it is not wanted politically.”

A civilian employee with the US armed forces said, “War is no solution. Wars can only do one thing: destroy everything. But if you look around, the whole world is rearming.” The same worker also explained that they “absolutely need an appropriate salary adjustment. We have had real genuine losses in the last years.”

Twice, those who spoke to WSWS suggested a “general strike” as a solution on their own initiative. When asked what should be done, an employee at Mainz University of Applied Sciences said, “I would find it good if we all went on strike together: a general strike! To really achieve something.”

The latest sell-out comes under conditions in which the Merz government is massively attacking the eight-hour day, sick payments, protection against dismissal and pensions. “We can no longer afford the welfare state,” Chancellor Friedrich Merz said last year. Workers in Germany were sick too often; they must work more again. Even dentist costs are to be paid by those with statutory insurance in the future.

Just a week ago, Verdi boss Frank Werneke had described such proposals as “insolent and presumptuous” and unacceptable. Now he is demonstrating his real attitude by forcing through a contract that will tie down workers and include a no-strike clause on the 925,000 employees in the federal states. And the contract at stake here has an indirect effect on millions of other people, both on civil servants and

pensioners, as well as on further agreements in local public transport, at airports, etc.

The deal also isolates those affected from their international colleagues who are currently engaged in industrial action, such as nursing staff in New York and California, as well as the movement against ICE in Minneapolis. The US offers a picture of intensified class struggles: Millions of workers and young people are confronted with a state that suppresses protests with brute force and arrests and deports foreign workers. In this situation, the signing of the new contract by Verdi means far more than a bad deal—it is a betrayal of the international working class.

Regarding this, Thomas Schrödl, a tram driver in Munich, said in a video on the struggle in the entire public sector:

Only the united power of the working class can force real changes—and not the agreements and manoeuvres of the union bureaucracy. We experience daily how the unions and the establishment parties make common cause with employers and the state, for example with the Concerted Action: They negotiate behind closed doors and do everything to prevent a joint strike. Verdi lets other public sector workers strike on different days than us, to divide and sell us out. Therefore, we must now become active ourselves and build independent rank-and-file action committees. We must unite internationally. Our perspective must be socialist.

Brothers and sisters: We have the power to shut down the cities if we act as a unit. Let us use this power—democratically, internationally and with the goal of defending the interests of the working class



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