

Verdi union supports German government's pro-war policies

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Last week at its national congress, service sector union Verdi practised solidarity with the pro-war policies of the German government. The delegates made it clear they support the constant escalation of the Ukraine war and horrendous rearmament, and ensured that the billions needed for this will be at workers' expense.

The congress was opened by Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrat, SPD). In his speech, he defended the arms deliveries to Ukraine and rejected any negotiated solution to the war. The basis for negotiations should only be "that the Russian president realizes he must withdraw troops." The war is thus to be intensified on the backs of the Ukrainian population until a complete military defeat is inflicted on the nuclear power Russia.

Four days later, while the congress was still in session, Scholz intensified this position in the UN General Debate with an angry tirade against Russia that even Hitler would have been proud of. Scholz made clear that Berlin was tying directly into German war aims in the two world wars: seeking control of Eastern Europe, Russia, and their rich resources as it ceaselessly fuels the war in Ukraine.

The Verdi bureaucrats threw their weight behind this insane war policy and fully supported the line taken by the head of government in his speech. In the lead motion—with the mendacious title "Perspectives for Peace, Security and Disarmament in a World in Upheaval"—the federal executive board declared it was "fundamentally right" to "help Ukraine under attack in many ways as well as to impose sanctions". This also included "weapons from the ranks of NATO members".

The union also agrees with the biggest rearmament offensive since the Second World War. The motion deplors the fact that even after doubling the defense budget in recent years, the German army allegedly has "infrastructure deficits and equipment deficits, including insufficient personal clothing for soldiers."

The "elimination of the existing deficiencies requires financial means," the lead motion states. Even the 100 billion euro "special fund" for the Bundeswehr (Armed

Forces) is not rejected by Verdi, who only criticize that this was decided on an "ad hoc" basis and was not complemented by similar programs in other areas.

The motion was clearly adopted by 657 votes to 170. The majority of delegates even prevented a full debate on the issue by way of a procedural resolution in order to nip any opposition in the bud.

The union is not only backing the brutal proxy war in Ukraine, which has already cost hundreds of thousands of lives and increases the threat of nuclear war every day. It is also supporting the militarization of the whole of society.

While health and education budgets are being cut, at least €80.5 billion are to flow into the Bundeswehr next year. Added to this is the expenditure for the promised arms deliveries to Ukraine, which amounted to €17.1 billion in the first 18 months of the war alone, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

These horrendous sums are being squeezed out of the working class. Verdi plays a central role in putting this brutal policy into action. It has pushed through massive cuts in real wages against workers in recent months.

In February, it unceremoniously strangled a strike decided by postal workers and pushed through a settlement that is far below the inflation rate and thus means a considerable loss of workers' purchasing power.

The union acted in a similar way with federal and municipal workers, who also suffered wage cuts. The millions of euros being taken out of workers' pockets in face of rapidly rising living costs are being used directly to buy new weapons and to prolong and intensify the war in Ukraine.

"This systematic reduction in wages is deliberate and a conscious political decision," WSWs commented on the federal and local government deals. "The Verdi sell-out must therefore be seen in a wider political context. It is a direct component of the pro-war policy of the German government, which is exploiting the Ukraine war to carry out the largest military build-up since Hitler." This is confirmed by the pro-war resolution of Verdi's congress.

Verdi is following the line that the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) had already set out at its federal congress in May 2022. At that time, the DGB, on behalf of its member unions, including Verdi, had described Putin's actions as a "war logic geared towards annihilation," putting the reactionary invasion of Ukraine on a par with the Nazis' war of extermination against the Soviet Union.

This boundless trivialization of Nazi crimes served the trade union bureaucrats to support both the sanctions against Russia and the supply of arms to Ukraine. The DGB called on the federal government and "NATO allies" to "provide comprehensive assistance to Ukraine, including contributing to its ability to effectively exercise its right to self-defense."

A month later, representatives of the trade unions and employers' associations met in the Chancellery to launch the so-called "Concerted Action." The talks served to "make working people pay for the horrendous costs of military rearmament and the consequences of the NATO offensive and the economic war against Russia, while preventing any resistance to it," as WSWS commented. The result was the foul deals that brought terrible losses in real wages for the working class.

Opposition among workers to this cuts diktat and the disastrous war policy is enormous. Independent rank-and-file action committees opposing militarism and cuts in real wages have formed at Deutsche Post, in the public sector, in the auto industry, and on the railways. They are calling on workers to unite internationally and take up the fight against the common front of the unions, corporations, and governments.

The trade union bureaucrats view this with nervousness. That is why pseudo-left and Stalinist groups within the bureaucracy organized some lukewarm protests before and at the Verdi congress. They presented an online petition entitled "Say No! Trade Unionists Against War, Militarism, and Industrial Peace" and held up a few banners during Scholz's speech.

The groups organizing the protest are deeply integrated into the trade union bureaucracy and have supported the massive cuts in real wages across the board. The pseudo-left groups only raised their criticism to make it appear that there was opposition within the bureaucracy to the right-wing and militarist course of the union leadership. That this is not the case was already shown by the re-election of Frank Werneke—the Verdi chairman responsible for the pro-war policy—with an overwhelming 92.5 percent.

In fact, the trade unions offered themselves as aides to German imperialism even before the First and Second World Wars. With the SPD approval of the Kaiser's war credits on 4 August 1914, the unions committed themselves to the policy of class peace against the workers and assured the

German army of support on the home front. They were directly co-responsible for the mass slaughter that followed.

Even after Hitler came to power in 1933, the ADGB, the forerunner of today's DGB, assured the Nazis of full support. The trade unions had "in the course of their history, for natural reasons, become more and more intertwined with the state itself" and were "an indispensable part of the social order itself."

This applied "whatever the nature of the state regime," the trade union federation said. In wartime, the union bureaucrats always defended capitalism to the point of total self-sacrifice.

At that time, however, the unions were still workers' organizations, seen by millions as instruments to advance their interests. That has changed thoroughly in the last 30 years. The globalisation of production and the deep crisis of capitalism have stripped the unions of their basis of operations—seeking reforms within the national framework. They have turned into co-managers, working closely with corporations and governments and using their apparatus as a police force to impose wage cuts and work pressure on workers.

This is why workers' struggles are increasingly taking the form of a rebellion against the apparatuses. In the US, the 160,000 workers of the Big Three auto companies have just voted overwhelmingly to strike, determined to reverse the cuts in real wages of recent years. But the United Auto Workers union is sabotaging the strike and working with the companies and the Biden administration to strangle it.

Just as in the US, a powerful working-class movement is developing around the world, not only against devastating wage cuts, but quite objectively in opposition to the pro-war policies and ultimately the capitalist system that produces them. The Verdi congress has once again made it clear that this movement can only be united and built internationally in the struggle against the bureaucratic apparatuses.

Workers must break the union straitjacket, build independent action committees, and turn to a socialist perspective. This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and its sister organizations are fighting for all over the world.



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