

Thousands strike once again in Germany against assault on educational and social programmes

Gregor Link

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Around 10,000 public sector employees took strike action once again Wednesday in Berlin for better working conditions and higher wages. These included teachers and educators from daycare centres and schools, as well as employees of the Senate and district administrations, firefighters and university employees.

The trade unions Verdi, GEW, IG Bau and GdP (police) called for a strike demonstration in front of the Brandenburg Gate. A further 6,000 people from all areas of the public service run by Germany's states took part in a rally in Hamburg on the same day. Even after two rounds of negotiations, there is still no offer from the employer.

The trade unions are calling for a 10.5 percent wage increase or at least 500 euros per month for a term of twelve months, as well as a "city-state allowance" of 300 euros for employees in Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen, to counteract the particularly high rents and cost of living.

In fact, from the point of view of the trade union bureaucracy, the strikes are mainly aimed at keeping the mass opposition under control, which is developing against years of austerity across public institutions. While trade union officials are imposing real wage cuts for employees—as they recently did for the railways, postal service, and municipalities—tens of billions of euros are being made available for corporations and the military.

This cooperation against the employees finds its clearest expression in "Concerted Action," a corporatist framework involving trade union leaders, government and employers' associations to agree on cuts and social attacks behind closed doors. These are then enforced with the help of the trade union bureaucracy.

In order to break through this policy, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) advocates the establishment of independent rank-and-file committees that unite internationally and lead a real struggle. The demonstration in Berlin also made it clear that countless employees are no longer prepared to accept the incessant attacks.

Maria has been a teacher at a Berlin support centre for four-and-a-half years. She said, "Even if we get 500 euros more, it does not compensate for the working conditions. We are in a class with too many students and have constantly growing workloads. There are fewer and fewer new colleagues and an increasing number who are untrained, which we then try to offset through mentoring and other measures. That's the main reason why we're striking. But nothing is shifting.

"We will have an increase to 16 students. These are our students who either have a high potential for violence, who are refugees, are traumatised, who have major personal difficulties and whose parents often do not speak the language. We do not have our own interpreters, which of course leads to problems in communication. The students no longer have any childcare facilities. In Berlin's all-day schools, students should be allowed to try out sports and music, but that does not happen. They are only kept in custody, and even that is done badly.

"The shortage of staff and the workload are compounded by sick leave, also due to the coronavirus pandemic. The duty of supervision can no longer be guaranteed. This also leads to repeated incidents of violence. We have the police with us all the time. Under these conditions, we will no longer live up to our educational mandate.

"We see pupils leaving school without being able to read and therefore having few future prospects. The fact that this country does not invest in the future of children, but rather spends even more money on tanks, is simply pathetic and sad."

Maria supports the demand to invest the Bundeswehr (German army) Special Fund in education and social work.

"What our students have experienced and are telling us are things that are hard to imagine," she said. "Many come from Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey and other countries in the region. Some have already attended five schools by their seventh or eighth school year. Some children have been in the home for seven years—since they have been here—and have no prospect

of an apartment. They do not have a sense of self-sufficiency and are not provided with therapeutic care.

“We also cover these things because no one else does it and no one feels responsible. No money is set aside for inclusion and integration. Instead, it’s always about letting the refugees work earlier.”

Maria said of the massacre in Gaza, “It’s not just about two nations. America is currently deploying the largest ship to the Mediterranean and Germany is also deploying troops to the Mediterranean. One wonders what is currently being done here. You want to make a statement but feel intimidated. But people all over the world are looking for networking.”

“We need a lot more money, and above all more staff,” said Paula, who runs a daycare centre and came to the demonstration with her employees Samira and Laura. “Calculating sick days is completely unrealistic. We are never staffed to meet the expected ratio. Actually, there is always a need for manpower.

“Some of the staff are already on the verge of a nervous breakdown. The educators are constantly understaffed but do everything in their power to somehow save everything. People are the sufferers of this situation. The exploitation of the proletarians increases.”

Many students and university employees also took part in the demonstration. A student worker commented, “Wages must be increased by significantly more than 10.5 percent. Dependencies are created in the departments, which make it impossible for us to criticise. Many of us work overtime that is not remunerated. These power structures must be dismantled.”

She continued, “All over the world, rents and food prices need to change. The healthcare system needs to be strengthened. The Bundeswehr should not get so much money. It’s a social struggle, it’s all connected.”

Felix confirmed this, stating, “Administration and teaching cannot be thought of independently of each other. We need more wages and better-equipped administration at universities. The vacancies that exist will not be filled because there are currently no applications due to the low salary level. Participation in academic activities therefore becomes a luxury.”

“We need more money, better expert advice and more recognition. The state of education is symbolic of the fact that reproductive work is not valid under capitalism,” said Sarah. “We need to think of all these struggles together. We have to stop the machines, strike and stop work.”

Regina, who has been working in parenting and family counselling in Tempelhof-Schöneberg since 2017, noted, “Employers say there is no money, but that’s not true. On the one hand, people are opposed to taxing millionaires and,

on the other hand, hundreds of billions of euros are spent on armaments. We are now to become ‘war-ready’ again, say the politicians! We need money for social welfare and work, not for weapons and war.

“Then they claim that too much money is being spent on the refugees. This is a disgrace and an impudence. In doing so, they divide us and create scapegoats—and that plays into the hands of the AfD (Alternative for Germany). There is enough money, it just needs to be distributed differently. We must not allow ourselves to be divided. Together we are more and stronger.

“My colleague who is a single parent has now accepted another job because her salary is not enough to support her two children. It can’t be right to work full-time and then be at risk of poverty. Politicians say: If you earn too little, apply for housing allowance. It’s inhuman. We have already swallowed far too much, and the end of the story is that a few have used the consequences for themselves and make huge profits.

“My friend works in England, there is currently also a broad strike movement in the hospitals, because there are also cuts taking place there. We can learn from this, stop working and make it clear that nothing works without us. This is the tradition of the workers’ movement. Even colleagues in the industrial sector have no interest in spending money on weapons.”

Regina sharply criticised the German government’s rearmament and war policy, saying, “The ‘new epoch’ is an absolute disaster. We have fought against rearmament and militarisation for decades. Now 100 billion euros are approved for weapons overnight and the peoples are to be turned against each other again. Germany is to be made fit again by the government in order to enforce its economic interests worldwide.

“My solidarity is with the Palestinian people. What is happening in Gaza is a disaster. The conflict did not only take place on October 7. For many decades previously, there had been arrests, destruction, and displacement of the Palestinian population. Illegal settlement construction must stop immediately, and the occupied territories must be evacuated. That’s very important.”



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