

Vote for rank-and-file committee slate in Berlin transit BVG staff council elections!

Transport Workers' Action Committee
18 October 2024

Dear colleagues,

We call on you to vote for the rank-and-file “Transport Workers’ Action Committee” slate in the upcoming staff council elections in mid-November at Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (Berlin Transit—BVG).

We are running in these elections to build new fighting structures that will enable us, rank-and-file transport workers, to intervene directly in workplace disputes.

Our goal is to develop the great strength and power that we have as workers. We want to strengthen the self-confidence of those who keep the city and the country moving. We are not supplicants or beggars. We have rights!

And we know that a joint struggle of all transport workers would paralyze the capital in no time and receive great support from the population.

We face major confrontations. BVG management and the Berlin Senate (the state executive) are planning massive social attacks as part of further privatization measures. These are bound up with a general attack on the rights of all workers. In order to finance horrendous levels of spending for rearmament, all areas of public service are being destroyed through austerity measures. Every aspect of social life is to be subordinated to the pro-war policy.

When Andy Niklaus, who heads the slate, called in the spring for support for the students at Humboldt University and their protest against the bombing terror in Gaza, he was immediately suspended from work. But Niklaus did not back down. He successfully repulsed this attack on freedom of speech and emphasized that we can only take action against privatization and wage theft if we also confront the war policy.

To develop our strength, it is necessary to break the dictatorship of the Verdi union apparatus. Our candidacy is part of a growing rebellion against Verdi.

If we are elected to the staff council, we will relentlessly expose the collaboration and collusion that exists between

the Verdi officials and BVG management as well as the Senate and all the parties in the Bundestag (the federal parliament).

Everyone here is familiar with the miserable conditions—unbearable shifts, ever-increasing work pressure, low wages. All of this has been approved by Verdi and the previous majority on the staff council. The Verdi officials on the company’s supervisory board and on the staff council act as management consultants and support the austerity programs in the name of “improving competitiveness”—in other words, increasing profits.

We will abolish secrecy on the staff council. We insist that no contract or service or operating agreement be signed without prior discussion and voting by the workforce!

The situation in the depots is becoming more unbearable from week to week. Hundreds of jobs for drivers and technical staff remain vacant because no one wants to put up with the stress of low pay and poor working conditions. Those who do their best to maintain public transport are falling ill more and more often. Now, on top of that, is the next wave of the coronavirus. Many are ruining their health for life. The risk of serious work and traffic accidents due to overwork is constantly increasing.

We are uncompromising opponents of the step-by-step privatization of BVG and other parts of the public transport system. Private service providers, such as Schröder-Reisen from Ulm, which is expanding in Berlin and has taken over some of the Flix buses, are trying to take over more and more BVG bus routes. Their goal is clear: radical social cuts, wage reductions and increased profits.

The Verdi officials are constantly telling us that deterioration of our working conditions and intensified exploitation are unavoidable in the face of international competition and intensified competition at home. At the same time, they, along with management, are stuffing

their own pockets.

In doing so, they only prove that our interests as workers are incompatible with the profit system. Capitalism is bankrupt. That is why we advocate the old socialist principle of the labor movement that our interests and needs as workers and the needs of the entire population take precedence over the profit interests of investors, speculators and the super-rich.

From this point of view, we will organize resistance against the austerity policies. In doing so, it is necessary to know our opponent.

The constant deterioration of our working conditions does not arise simply from the minds of the BVG board members, but is part of a comprehensive attack on the rights of all workers, driven forward by companies, trade unions and the government. Rampant inflation, constant price increases and rent increases are lowering the real wages of all workers.

And now, mass layoffs are being organized in industry to remain “competitive.” Public services and state-owned companies are being starved of funds in order to pursue a policy of war.

International competition finds its counterpart in the policy of war. Just as they trample on the rights of workers at home, they aggressively enforce their economic interests globally with military force. Eighty-three years after Hitler’s war of extermination, German tanks are once again rolling against Russia, and in Gaza the German government is reverting to backing methods of genocide.

Verdi supports this war policy and wants to suppress any opposition to it. On the sidelines of the last Verdi congress in September last year, Verdi National Chairman Frank Werneke declared, “I am absolutely in favor of creating a special fund [€100 billion for the Bundeswehr—the armed forces]. This is necessary, and €100 billion will probably not be enough by far.”

For us, this policy means more and more cuts, and for millions of people in Gaza, Lebanon, Ukraine and Russia, it means indescribable suffering, which directly affects many of our colleagues. If you do not believe that, you can talk to Ali Mohamed, who is a candidate on our list and who has lost most of his family in the Middle East.

If we do not want to be led like lambs to the slaughter, we have to fight back against these policies and link the fight for higher wages and better working conditions with the fight against military rearmament and war. We have to counter the logic of war and international competition with the solidarity of workers around the world.

We are internationalists because we know that workers everywhere face the same problems and can only achieve their legitimate demands together. We defend not only our migrant colleagues, but also refugees and asylum seekers. We are already in contact with bus drivers’ action committees in London, Munich and many other cities and have joined together in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. We don’t just talk about international solidarity, we organize it!

That is why we are opposed to the “Kraft durch Basis” (“Strength Through the Base”) list, which criticizes Verdi but accepts far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) members into its ranks. We strictly reject cooperation with right-wingers and fascists. Anyone who is familiar with the history of industrial action at BVG—our company was founded almost a century ago in 1928—knows how wrong and dangerous it is to support right-wingers out of anger against the corrupt trade union apparatus.

Brothers and Sisters, we know that many are disinterested in and opposed to the staff council elections because they know from experience that the fundamental problems will remain. That is why we emphasize that we are linking our candidacy to the establishment of the “Transport Workers’ Action Committee” and creating new structures for struggle.

So use your right to vote to restart the resistance!

Come to our online election meetings, where we will discuss concrete next steps! Check this page for the dates and links to next the meetings.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact