

German public service workers: Vote down the miserable arbitration result! Prepare an all out strike!

Dietmar Gaisenkersting
8 April 2025

As expected, the United Services Trade Union (Verdi) in Germany has accepted the decision by an arbitration commission, which means cuts in real wages and prepares the ground for future deterioration in working conditions. The approximately 3 million public service workers in Germany are supposed to pay with their wages and jobs for the one trillion euros agreed by the government for armaments and war.

We call upon workers to reject the deal in the vote organised by Verdi and demand the removal of the right of the union to negotiate on behalf of the workforce. The Verdi leadership headed by Frank Werneke and Christine Behle do not reflect the views of workers but rather the political and economic establishment. Both Verdi leaders are long time members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and support the war policy of the former and new federal government.

We call on all workers to form independent action committees and prepare an all-out unlimited strike. You can register your interest by WhatsApp to the mobile number +49 163-3378 340 or register directly using the form at the end of the article.

On Sunday, Verdi's national public service wage commission approved the recommendation of the arbitration commission headed by the right-wing Christian Democrat politician Roland Koch. If the Verdi apparatus has its way, employees will get nothing for the first three months of this year; a pay freeze has been agreed for this period. Only beginning April 1 are workers to receive an increase of just three percent, or at least 110 euros more per month. In May 2026, wages and salaries are then due to rise by a further 2.8 percent. Shift and alternate shift allowances are to be increased to 100 and 200 euros respectively on July 1, 2026. From 2027, workers will receive an additional day off. The contract is due to run until March 31, 2027, i.e., 27 months.

From 2026, the annual bonus is to be increased to 85 percent of monthly pay for employees in cities and municipalities and between 75 and 95 percent of monthly

pay for federal employees, depending on their pay grade. The employees of hospitals and care facilities are excluded. "For them, the annual bonus in pay groups 1-8 will be increased to 90 percent as compensation. From pay group 9a, it will be increased to 85 percent."

Additional agreements that can be used to reduce wages and increase working hours are also part of the deal. "Parts of the annual bonus can be converted into up to three days off in the future," according to the Verdi flyer on the agreement. This marks the beginning of "an optional model."

Workers, who have been under considerable financial pressure in recent years due a succession of low contracts are also to be offered the "option of voluntarily increasing their weekly working hours to up to 42 hours" as of January 1, 2026. In view of rising prices, such an offer cannot be considered voluntary, especially for lower wage and salary groups. Around half a million jobs remain vacant in the public sector and the workload is therefore extremely high in hospitals, daycare centers and some government agencies.

Now workers are faced with a decision in the future: either they pay a toll on their health and take three days of vacation at the cost of reducing their annual bonus, or they will be under so much financial pressure they will be forced to work 42 hours a week.

From the outset, the Verdi leadership had no intention of pushing through the original demand for an 8 percent wage increase over a period of 12 months with three additional (unconditional) vacation days, although this deal was sorely needed in view of soaring prices. Instead, wage increases have now been agreed that will lead to a further loss of purchasing power in the face of rising rents and inflation.

Verdi agreed to this miserable deal because the union is closely tied to the government and in particular supports its insane war policy. That is why Verdi played along with the employers, led by Federal Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser and Gelsenkirchen's Lord Mayor Karin Welge (both

SPD). Faeser and Welge refused to make any sort of offer in the first two rounds of negotiations. Then in the third round, they proposed an open provocation: 5.5 percent more pay, without specifying the duration, as well as a small increase in the annual bonus and shift bonuses.

Negotiator Werneke was desperate to reach a deal. “We have reached the pain barrier. The employers have rejected our settlement proposals,” he complained. Werneke and the union apparatus had come to the conclusion they could not accept the employers’ provocation without provoking a rebellion by the employees. Workers in airports, daycare centers and clinics, sanitation and garbage collection, culture, public transportation and administration had demonstrated their anger and willingness to fight in warning strikes and protests, some of which lasted several days. In response, Faeser declared the negotiations a failure and proposed arbitration.

The Federal Interior Minister then appointed Koch as mediator. Faeser, who comes from the state of Hesse, knows him well. Koch was Premier of Hesse from 1999 to 2010, after which he boosted his career with a lucrative post at the construction company Bilfinger-Berger.

After accepting the arbitration recommendation that it had drafted, the Verdi leadership claimed in a flyer that “the federal public service wage commission weighed this result long and hard in a controversial debate.” It said that a contract result is “always an expression of the balance of power.” He continued: “Do we see any room for manoeuvre to get more out of these employers at this time against a background of new political conditions? The answer was no.”

This is a blatant lie. In fact, Verdi itself has done everything it can to weaken the workers’ ability to fight. Instead of organizing a joint all out strike, the union neatly divided up the occupational groups currently involved in contract bargaining—in addition to the public sector, these include the postal service, the Berlin public transit company, BVG and many other public transit companies. The union also only organized ineffective token strikes. Now Verdi is declaring that no other result would have been possible without even starting a fight!

When Verdi makes these claims, it is simply declaring its support for the official war policy. One trillion euros are being made available to make Germany’s “fit for war.” while declaring there is no money available for three million public employees!

Verdi is now launching a membership survey on the contract proposal in order to enforce the result by May 9. This is because the survey will be reinterpreted in retrospect as a strike ballot, just like the one at the post office. Although Verdi took care to ensure that voting at the post

office could not take place everywhere, 54 percent of the votes cast were against accepting the arbitration recommendation. Verdi then declared that rejection meant approval of an unlimited strike. According to the union’s statutes, however, 75 percent of the votes cast would be required to arrive at this decision. Although the majority rejected the result, it was still accepted.

Such a maneuver by Verdi in the public sector must be prevented. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call on workers to organize themselves independently of the Verdi apparatus in action committees in all cities and municipalities.

These action committees must, first, ensure that everyone can vote on the result. Second, they must campaign massively for a “no” vote on the result.

In the meantime, a full strike must be prepared that will force the employers to meet the demands. Not a cent should be paid for mass destruction, but rather billions for decent wages, better working conditions through more staff with shorter working hours, for the expansion or reopening of schools, libraries, swimming pools, youth centers, etc.

The fight for better working conditions and higher wages must be linked to the fight against war through the action committees. Workers must be mobilized far beyond public sector employees, not only in Germany, but in Europe and the world. They are under just as much pressure as here. In France, Great Britain, Austria and the other European countries, public sector employees are also taking action against the austerity and war budgets of their respective governments, which are all preparing for war.

In the United States, hundreds of thousands of colleagues in federal workplaces, healthcare, schools, etc. are currently losing their jobs and livelihoods. These workers are our allies.

Join the fight for action committees. Contact us via Whatsapp (mobile number +49 163-3378 340) or register directly using the following form.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact