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Germany

Teachers in Germany say no!

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After several warning strikes and an indefinite strike of four weeks, which lasted until mid-June, the local government employers' association, responsible for agreements affecting two million public service employees, requested the aid of the mediation system which (by law) forced a break in the strike.

The proposal from the mediators consisted of an average wage increase of 3.4 %, which privileges management personnel (according to the mediators, nursery directors would get a wage increase of 4.5%), while for the vast majority of the staff concerned (teachers and other employees) the increase varied between 1 and 3%.

The leaders of the public services trade union Ver.di (one of the biggest union federations in the DBG – the German Trade Union federation) were ready to accept this proposal, but meetings of the staff concerned organized in Ver.di that took place at the end of June spoke out against the proposal of the mediators, not only in relation to the wage increase, but also in relation to the duration of the agreement, which was supposed to last for the very long period of five years.

A month ago we predicted that if the consultation among the staff affected and the resumption of negotiations with the employers in mid-August did not go well, a return to strike action was likely in the autumn. Consultation between the members of Ver. di and the GEW, a small teachers' union in the DGB, took place in July and the first few days of August; its result leaves no room for doubt: nearly 70% of those affected in the two trade unions rejected the proposal of the mediators, as did more than 60% of teachers and social workers organized in the DBB (the union of the state civil service, independent of the DBG).

As pointed out by the president of Ver.di, Frank Bsirske, this result “is a clear message to the leadership of the union as well as the employers”; and he added: “The strike will continue. Mediation has failed”. On August 11, the committee on collective bargaining at the federal level will meet in Frankfurt to take a position. If the employer does not back down in the negotiations that will take place on August 13, the struggle will resume its course in the following days, and it is hoped that there will be weeks of massive strikes.

The determination of the teachers has a simple explanation. The campaign developed to launch the strike marked as its objective achieving a real revaluation of educational work, traditionally regarded as feminine and, therefore, poorly paid. This revaluation with regard to wages meant matching other public employees with similar professional qualifications, which would mean an average wage increase of 10%.

Add to that the fact that the working conditions of teachers have increasingly got harder. Every day they are forced to respond to new tasks (integration, inclusion, preparation and so on) without a staff specifically trained for these tasks.

It is reassuring that, unlike six years ago, on this occasion, the legitimacy of the claims and the struggle of the teachers enjoy wide recognition among the public, while a significant number of parents affected by the strike have been in solidarity with them. A victory for the teachers would give encouragement to other sectors, especially those who are in the process of privatization and are victims of the deterioration in their working and living conditions.

Thus, for example, Lufthansa pilots are opposing new manoeuvres that attempt to increase profits at the expense of the people employed and the security of passengers. To improve their ability to compete with the low cost companies, Lufthansa wants to use old Airbus 330 and 340s for long journeys (Kenya, Mauritania or Mexico) and

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wants these to be flown by 200 pilots from its “autonomous” subsidiary CityLine, who have been trained and have experience only over short distances (Berlin-Dusseldorf or Cologne-Hamburg!). In addition, Lufthansa pilots experienced in long journeys should help the CityLine pilots to be trained in this new task!

The majority of pilots consider this plan, known as the “Jump”, to be unacceptable: “Are we going to be responsible for eliminating our own jobs?” they ask, and they have offered a lot of arguments to prove that this plan is a danger to the safety of flight staff and users. If the Lufthansa management persists in this, we are at the gates of a new conflict. (See the Cologne newspaper *Express*, August 9, 2015.)