

# Workers „RE-WOLT“ against Wolt

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Deutsche Übersetzung: <https://arbeiterinnenmacht.de/2023/06/21/arbeiterinnen-re-wolt-gegen-wolt/>

Berlin: Fifty Wolt workers and sympathisers took to the square in front of Zentrum Kreuzberg at U Kottbusser Tor on Monday, 19th June 2023, to protest against non-payment of wages, deprivation from paid sickness leave and other labour law provisions. Their banner read "Wolt owes us money and rights" followed by the logo of the protest campaign, called "ReWolt" – a play on the company's name and the word "revolt".

The protest was organised by the Wolt Workers Collective, which is a network of Wolt workers in Berlin who had earlier organised a protest on April 13 this year. Monday's protest was a continuation of the series of protests that workers have planned to organise until they are given their basic rights. The recent protest movement in Berlin began when a fleet of 120 migrant workers were denied payment for several months, amounting to several thousands of euros in unpaid wages. They had been hired by Wolt through a subcontractor who goes by the name Ali and runs a mobile phone accessories shop in Neukölln on Karl Marx Straße by the name Mobile World. At the last protest, workers cycled their way from U Karl Marx Straße to the Wolt headquarters in Friedrichshain where they had intended to deliver a written charter of their demands for the unpaid wages to Wolt management. Members of Gruppe Arbeiterinnenmacht were present there and we witnessed how management refused to even come out of their offices and receive the charter of demands. When Muhammad, the leader of the protest, tried to put the charter in the mailbox of the enterprise, he was told that Wolt did not have a mailbox.

What began as a campaign of unpaid employees being denied wages under the farce of a subcontractor excuse has now evolved and grown into a collective struggle that also involves directly hired employees of Wolt. Together, these workers demand their rightful payment of wages, occupational safety, workers' compensation, an end to the super-exploitative and illegal subcontracting system, and paid sickness leave among other rights. To make their voice heard, they organised a protest on Monday, where a number of workers and their friends and sympathisers spoke against the injustices they have been facing.

## Workers accuse

"I am a migrant student and struggle to live here in Germany with my family," said Muhammad, the leader of the protest. "My wife and I work odd jobs to make ends meet. Wolt has stolen three months of my wages. And I am not alone. We are many migrant students facing the same situation at the hands of this company. Because we are migrants, many students are even afraid of protesting. I went to the Wolt store in person eight times to claim my wages. However, the manager, whom everyone only knows as Ali from Mobile World GmbH, repeatedly refused and finally said that he has not been paid by Wolt to pay our wages. When we have delivered orders on time and with honest dedication, the least we deserve is to be paid! All labour has dignity. It is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starving wages."

His colleague, Shiwani Sharma, who has also not been paid her wages, spoke about the hardships these workers have been facing as a result of the wage theft. "I am a student in a private university in Berlin and it is already very difficult to cope with the challenges of high rent and high tuition fees," she said. "I joined Wolt as a rider in the month of December. It was freezing cold weather but

we would go door to door to deliver food to customers. On some days, we would get severe pain in our hands because the weather was so cold. All the while, the Wolt management sat in their comfortably heated offices. They get the money to heat their offices due to our hard work but then they deprive us of even our meagre wages. We deserve to be paid! And we deserve at least a minimum wage per hour instead of the per order payments. This per order payment system must be abolished!"

Another rider of Indian background, Abhay, described his experience with Wolt as a roller coaster ride. According to him, these workers worked eight to ten hours in the freezing months of December and January, thinking that they might be paid to be able to afford their university fees and other expenses. "What do I get after this work? Wolt denied to pay me. I thought they will pay me next month. But I have not been paid for November, December and January. The HR department of Wolt has even denied before that we are their workers. We have everything to prove that we worked for Wolt. We want to be paid."

Janno, a friend of the workers from the Welcome United campaign, said that illegal business practices such as wage theft must be stopped. "Many of the delivery services violate basic rights and laws on the backs of their riders on a daily basis," he said. "It's not a coincidence. It's not an accident. It's their business model."

Delivery riders from Gorillas, Lieferando, and other such companies were also present to make their case regarding precarious work. Joey from Workers Centre, who is also a Gorillas rider, spoke about the plight of migrant workers in Germany's gig economy and situated it in the larger European context of structural racism. They condemned Greek authorities' inaction and European apathy in general towards the Pakistani, Syrian and other victims of the recent drowning of an overcrowded boat in the Mediterranean.

At the end, Theater X performed a theatrical sketch on the plight of affected delivery workers.

## **Capitalism and superexploitation**

Germany's cost of living crisis is already becoming more and more unbearable with each passing day. It is already so difficult for us workers to make ends meet even on minimum wage. Workers employed in the precarious sector are now deprived of even that wage. It is absolutely shameful that this practice of wage theft can happen in a so-called democratic state like Germany. But what it also shows is that the state is always representative of the interests of the capitalist class. And that is why we as workers have to unite ourselves and make the trade unions collective fighting organisations that represents us but also that we need a workers' party that in reality represents us and our interests.

Our comrade, Martin, gave a moving speech at the protest. He said he was a member of IG Metall (the largest industrial union in Germany and Europe), and even though his union belongs to a different trade, it is important that we see ourselves as waging a struggle together. "This is something that the trade unions in Germany do not do at all or do not do sufficiently. This is something that we need to change in the next years together. Your struggle, your courage, your fight against outsourcing, against subcontracting, against the robbing of your wages shows not only what kind of measures Wolt and other criminal capitalists are undertaking in order to secure their profits. It also shows that you are not victims and you can fight back and you have proven that you can organise and that we can organise ourselves. Therefore, it is important that we demand solidarity and a common struggle with the trade unions in the same sector like the NGG, Ver.di and all others because the struggle you wage is not only important for you, it will also be important for the whole working class. The more the precarious sector expands, the more it will undercut wages

everywhere! This is why it is not just a question of solidarity but rather a question of self-interest of every worker to support this struggle. We have to buy food and pay rent irrespective of the weather and that is why we have to question the system that is behind stealing of a wage that is itself insufficient to pay for basic needs. Hundreds of millions of migrant workers, women and the most disadvantaged and oppressed sections of the working class are driven into these conditions by the expansion of gig economy. If we want an end to this system, we also have to question the right to the profits which Lieferando, Wolt, Flink and all the others are making for themselves. If they are not prepared to pay the wages on time, if they are not prepared to pay wages sufficient for a living, then those companies should be expropriated without compensation! We need to make history out of a system which stands on exploitation, on racism, on war and oppression!"

This is not the first time that the question of expropriation has been raised in the streets of Berlin. In 2021, the Deutsche Wohnen Enteignen (Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen) referendum was successful, even if lawmakers have failed to act on the will of the Berlin population who voted in favour of expropriating the real estate company, Deutsche Wohnen, in light of the housing and rent crisis. "We are no longer willing to finance the profits of the shareholders with our excessive rents!" reads their website. Profits of companies enjoying the privileges offered to the capitalist class through precarious gig work are now increasingly coming under question. Some German school students had also come to the protest to express solidarity with the unpaid migrant workers. "The fact that the management is not willing to pay you is an insolence," said Kai, who is also a member of communist youth group Revolution. "As youth interested in our future, we see the necessity to unite with your current struggle and with the struggle of all around the world. We are students or trainees today and we will be workers one day. Your struggle now is also a struggle for our future. We are also being oppressed by the same system that oppresses you." As he ended his speech, the crowd shouted in unison, "Students and workers, unite and fight!"

A solidarity message received from the speaker of the Vernetzung für kämpfersiche Gewerkschaften read: "I express my solidarity with your struggle. As an active trade unionist for many decades, I have to say that it is a shame that the non-payment of workers is possible again in this country. That the minimum right of wage-labour, that the wage is paid, is not respected! The trade unions of the DGB, the parties that claim to represent the working people, SPD and the Left Party, have to be criticised for allowing the laws for temporary work and platform economy that have eroded workers' rights. It's their duty to fight for re-establishment of these rights and for the defence of the workers concerned."

It was positive that Ferat Kocak of Die Linke Neukölln responded to our call for solidarity and sent Comrade Daniel in his stead to express solidarity with the workers. We call upon all left forces and trade unions to respond alike and help build this movement as an active struggle. After all, it is in the self-interest of all workers to prevent the expansion of precarious work and to collectively fight for the application of minimum wage and other basic labour rights on all! Therefore, as a first step, we call on everyone to come to the court hearing on 27 July, so that the courts also know that we stand together.

Hoch die Internationale Solidarität!