

French railway workers support German rail strike

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with railway workers in Paris on Thursday. They expressed their support and solidarity for the ongoing national rail strike by their counterparts in Germany.

The German rail strike has been underway Thursday afternoon. The drivers and other rail employees are opposing the efforts of the Deutsche Bahn national operator to impose a labour contract that cuts pensions and enforces a zero percent wage rise—in reality, given inflation, a real wage cut. The company is effectively demanding that the workforce bear the brunt of the costs of the coronavirus pandemic through a further reduction in its conditions.

Their French counterparts are familiar with the international assault underway against railway workers. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he would scrap the railway statute that had been in place since World War II. Thousands of workers have since been laid off; the railways are being steadily opened up to competition from private providers, while new-hire workers are being hired on different conditions, with fewer protections and on lower wage scales.

In June 2018, French rail workers conducted a powerful strike to oppose Macron's pro-corporate law. The strike was defeated because it was isolated by the rail unions, who refused to mobilise any broader support in the working class and kept the workers isolated.

"Good luck to the workers in Germany," said Louis, who inspects tickets on the SNCF network and has been working on the rail lines since 2016. "If they are still fighting they can't give up, because once you give up it's finished. I support them completely especially if they want to avoid what we have just been through."

In the wake of the 2018 strike, Louis explained, "the

rules that are supposed to protect us in terms of hours and conditions are not respected at all. We are all exhausted. We work hours that are completely absurd now."

When he heard that the German rail networks were demanding that the workers bear the costs of the pandemic, Louis replied that "it is the same situation here. It's the employees who have to pay. They have already laid off workers and made other changes to the schedules since the beginning of the pandemic. They took advantage of it to get rid of temporary workers. Now many of us work nine or ten hours a day because there are fewer people to do the same work. The coronavirus was just an excuse to do what they wanted to do for a long time."

"I hope that the passengers are with them and support them," Louis added. "What they have to do is explain to the population why they are on strike and show them what is going to happen if we don't strike. The times when we explained this to the public they felt it and understood it."

Louis said he thought it would be powerful for workers in Germany, France and across Europe to conduct united actions together. "But it would be on the condition that we had a spokesperson, a real representation which speaks on behalf of the workers. Often the union heads are just there for themselves, or prefer to fight with one another than make a common front against the enemy."

Stefan, a driver with 23 years' experience, gave this message to the strikers in Germany: "We support them, as train drivers in Europe. They should know that what impacts them can come here as well. The more that time passes, the more our conditions tend to become the same. The more there are things that impact them, the more it will affect us. We have to support them."

“In Germany I believe they have had competition in the rails for a number of years,” he said. “Now they are doing this here too, and it will come into force in the next years. We are not yet fully impacted but it will come quick. I think they are trying to bring the level down everywhere. It is up to the workers to do the maximum to defend their interests.”



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