

Workers engage in second nationwide warning strike at Deutsche Bahn

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From 3 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday, all trains in Germany were at a standstill. As part of the collective bargaining negotiations with Deutsche Bahn, the Railway and Transport Union (EVG) called for a warning strike until 11 a.m., whereupon management suspended all long-distance services until 1 p.m. During this time, regional and local rail services were largely cancelled.

In parallel, aviation security workers at Cologne/Bonn, Düsseldorf and Hamburg airports have been on strike since Thursday, with those at Stuttgart joining them Friday. They are fighting for better bonuses for the irregular and inconvenient shift times and for the overtime they must repeatedly work. These payments have not been raised for years.

This is the second warning strike on the railways in this collective bargaining round. On March 27, the EVG, together with services union Verdi and the Civil Servants' Association, had called for a so-called "mega-strike" that paralyzed local and long-distance traffic, major airports and freight shipping throughout Germany for a day.

The EVG's call for another warning strike is a response to the high level of combativeness among rail workers. For 20 years, managers have been cutting the company to the bone. The employees are paying for this twice: through miserable wages and unacceptable working conditions. While managers collect millions in salaries and bonuses, wages and jobs are cut. The workforce must make good for delays and other mishaps, and not infrequently feels the wrath of exasperated passengers.

Now, Deutsche Bahn's attempt to impose a deal on the workforce far below the rate of inflation—and thus a massive cut in real wages—has been the straw that broke the camel's back.

The EVG is demanding 12 percent more pay for the 180,000 employees of Deutsche Bahn and all affiliated rail companies, with at least €650 extra a month for a

12-month contract. But the pugnacious words of its officials cannot hide the fact that it has long been preparing a sellout. Holding a warning strike before a round of negotiations, in which a miserable agreement is then reached, has become a tradition in German collective bargaining. It serves to let off steam and is part of the well-rehearsed negotiating ritual.

Next Tuesday, April 25, the EVG will meet with the Deutsche Bahn board for the second round of negotiations. Three days earlier, on April 22, the service sector union Verdi will be negotiating with the federal government and local authorities on the arbitration ruling for the public sector, which means a massive reduction in real wages. Basic pay rates are to be increased by only 5.5 percent or at least €340 over a period of 24 months, with an annual inflation rate of around 8 percent.

Since the Verdi representatives in the arbitration committee have already agreed to the ruling, it can be assumed that it will be accepted—possibly in slightly modified form—and then serve as a template for Deutsche Bahn. Martin Seiler, the board member responsible for personnel at Deutsche Bahn, has already suggested this. He praised the arbitrator's decision, saying, "The proposed solution in the public sector shows that it works! The absolute priority now is to quickly reach a solution at Deutsche Bahn as well ..."

EVG negotiators Kristian Loroach and Cosima Ingenschay indignantly rejected Seiler's "offer" as a provocation and stressed: "Workers feel ridiculed." But they are talking out of both sides of their mouth at the same time. While they feign indignation while speaking to the workers, they are signalling to Deutsche Bahn and the federal government that they do not want to hurt them and are only "fighting" symbolically.

How else can it be explained that after the first successful warning strike they are limiting the second one to a few hours? Even the conservative *Frankfurter*

Allgemeine Zeitung acknowledges the efforts of the EVG to dampen down the conflict, writing, “Ingenschay tried to dispel concerns that operations would be affected for the entire day. She sees the employers as having a duty to get operations back on track as quickly as possible after 11 a.m. on Friday. ‘Workers will be working with verve from 11 a.m. to get everything running again,’ she said.”

It is perfectly clear that the management board and federal government—Deutsche Bahn is wholly owned by the federal government—only understand the language of struggle. But the EVG wants to avoid an indefinite strike at all costs.

For a long time, the in-house union at Deutsche Bahn has openly represented the interests of the company. Through supervisory board positions, bonuses, and numerous internal channels, EVG’s top staff participate in the profits of the management. The EVG is also linked by thousands of ties to the governing Social Democrats (SPD) and Green parties. At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the EVG entered an “alliance for our railways” with the federal government and management, imposing the costs of the crisis on the workers through a pay freeze.

The dispute at Deutsche Bahn is part of an international upsurge of the class struggle that is taking hold of ever broader layers of the working class. In Germany’s public sector, more than two and a half million airport workers, nurses, kindergarten teachers, refuse collectors, and other workers are in struggle against cuts in real wages and social provisions. Strikes and protests are on the rise across Europe.

In Greece, a catastrophic train accident with 57 fatalities triggered a general strike movement under the slogan “Our dead—your profits.” In France, rail workers are playing a leading role in the uprising against the Macron government’s pension cuts. Railroad workers are also on strike in Italy, Belgium, and Scandinavia. In Norway, the biggest wage dispute in 23 years is currently taking place. In Sweden, drivers on Stockholm commuter trains have taken wildcat strike action since Monday against the fact that they must operate trains alone without conductors in the future.

These struggles are directed against a ruling class that has its back to the wall and is responding with violence both at home and abroad. In Ukraine, it is waging a proxy war against Russia, which it continues to escalate even though this threatens to lead to a nuclear third world war. And it is preparing a war against China with ever new provocations to stop its economic rise. It is unloading the

cost of this madness onto working people.

In France, President Macron is pushing through a drastic reduction in pensions against the will of the vast majority and is responding to resistance with brutal police violence. In Germany, the coalition government is pouring hundreds of billions into war and rearmament, while the social infrastructure is crumbling and real wages are falling.

These attacks can only be beaten back if workers unite internationally across industries and organize independently of the unions, which are in cahoots with the governments and corporations everywhere.

To do this, workers must build independent rank-and-file action committees, over which the unions have no influence. The International Committee of the Fourth International and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) have taken the initiative to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to advance and coordinate internationally the building of action committees.

The first task of rail workers’ action committees must be to prevent a sell-out by EVG and to fight for an indefinite strike. It must achieve a wage settlement that fully compensates for inflation and the income losses of the past years.

The action committees must become the starting point for the struggle for a society in which the working class—the great majority—is in charge and in which human needs, not the profits of the rich, are decisive—that is, for a society organized according to socialist principles.

We call on rail workers to contact us. Network with your colleagues at Deutsche Post and in public service. The action committees can be reached by Whatsapp message to +49-163-337-8340.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact