

Strike ballot at Deutsche Bahn: Vote for strike and build action committees independent of the unions

Transport Workers Action Committee
23 June 2023

Dear colleagues at Deutsche Bahn:

The failure of contract bargaining between national rail operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) and the EVG union, which is now preparing to ballot for indefinite strike action, makes it necessary for you to organise yourselves independently from EVG. Do not fool yourselves, the union is playing a double game. While initiating the ballot, it is continuing talks with management behind your backs and preparing a sellout.

It is necessary to take the preparation for strike action into your own hands. Place no trust in the EVG!

The Transport Workers Action Committee includes bus, underground and tram drivers in local public transport. In the past years, public service union Verdi has imposed on us one cut in real wages and deterioration in our working conditions after another. Verdi, the EVG, the train drivers union GDL and other unions stand on the other side, on the side of government and the employers.

This is obvious at Deutsche Bahn. In months of negotiations, the federal government, as the owner of the railways, has proven that it wants to make an example of you and drastically reduce your real wages. The EVG has shown that it is not prepared to do anything about it.

The role of the EVG has been made clear in the contracts it has signed with the Transdev Group on Tuesday. Transdev, which runs regional transit companies across the country, is the largest rail operator in Germany after DB.

The EVG has agreed substantial cuts in real wages, with Transdev workers' wages only being raised by €290 from November 1, 2023 and by a further €130 from August 1, 2024 (for "junior staff," €150 and €70). Even lower amounts have been agreed for the Transdev Service company. The EVG is not even trying to disguise this reduction in real wages with the help of a €1,000 one-off

"inflation compensation" payment. The new contract will run for 21 months!

In view of the current level of inflation, especially the horrendous price increases for energy and food, on which we have to spend almost all our money, this means a drastic reduction in real wages. Since the end of 2020, energy prices have increased by 50 percent and food prices by 31 percent.

The DB board, which grants astronomical salary and bonus increases to its executives, has rejected even the small nominal increases agreed at Transdev and has also insisted on a contract lasting 27 months.

If the EVG is now preparing a strike ballot, it is only because it fears losing control otherwise. Extremely irregular and long shift times, too short breaks and low wages, sometimes even below the minimum wage, characterise your everyday life in public transport just like ours. Your working conditions are so bad, your wages so low, that anger against the railway companies is justifiably extremely high. The warning strikes, where you have paralysed the whole country several times, have shown what fighting power you can exercise.

But the EVG wants to prevent an indefinite all-out strike. It had reduced the warning strikes to a mere token and finally called off the announced 50-hour strike.

It is also not certain that the EVG will organise a strike at all, even if you vote for it! Workers at Deutsche Post can tell you a thing or two about this. There, 86 percent of Verdi members had rejected an offer from Deutsche Post and voted for an indefinite strike. But Verdi refused to call a strike, presented another almost identical offer within 48 hours, and then pushed it through.

As the DB house union, the EVG has also openly represented the interests of the company for a long time. The EVG leaders participate in the profits of management

through their supervisory board positions, bonuses and transfers to jobs in company management.

The German government is the owner of Deutsche Bahn. The EVG is also linked to it through numerous connections to the governing parties, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens. At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the EVG entered into an “alliance for our railways” with the federal government and railway management. It made rail workers pay for the costs of the crisis through a wage freeze.

Since then, the crisis has become extremely acute. The government is using the war in Ukraine to push through the biggest military build-up since the end of the Second World War. All trade unions—including the EVG—play an important role in this. Last year, they strengthened their collaboration with the government and agreed the corporatist Concerted Action to pass on the costs of the war against Russia and the militarisation of Germany to us workers. We are supposed to pay for all this with low wages and increased exploitation through constantly worsening working conditions.

In order to prevent this, we must organise ourselves independently of the trade unions. This is also true with regard to the GDL, which in the past has often presented itself as the more militant version of the EVG. The recently announced GDL demands for the autumn contract bargaining dispute are still below the demands of the EVG. But what is worse, the GDL’s announcement of the creation of “Fairtrain,” a temporary work agency disguised as a cooperative, marks the latest low point in the transformation of the trade unions into corporate stooges and companies that themselves exploit workers.

Hundreds of thousands work for the railways and bus companies; over 200,000 at DB in Germany. We are not alone. Railway workers’ willingness to strike is part of an international upsurge of class struggle in which workers are fighting back against cuts in real wages, jobs, and social provisions. Strikes and protests are on the rise across Europe.

But everywhere we are confronted with the corrosive politics of the trade union apparatuses. We must oppose them and deny them the right to determine wage demands and the measures of struggle.

The Transport Workers Action Committee therefore calls on you to build your own rank-and-file action committee independent of the EVG—and the GDL—and to contact us and other action committees to fight together for our wages and working conditions.

Our action committee is based on two basic principles:

- We consistently fight for workers’ interests and demands without submitting to the profit interests of the companies or the pro-war policies of the government. By doing this, we combine the struggle against wage and social cuts with the struggle against war.

- We stand for resolute international solidarity and collaboration. We know that in all countries, we workers face the same or similar problems, and a common struggle is necessary.

The immediate task of your Action Committee is to prevent a sellout by the EVG and to organise an indefinite strike in order to fully enforce your demands and achieve a contract that more than compensates for inflation and the loss of income in past years, and which improves your working conditions.

Through the Action Committee, you can link your strike to other industrial disputes in Germany and to struggles across Europe. In France, Britain, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands and many other countries, there are also fierce class struggles and the building of independent action committees has begun there too.

Do not lose time! Only by taking action yourselves and uniting independently can you ensure a strike happens and improve your real wages and working conditions.

Share this call in all your workplaces, in canteens and break rooms, spread it through social media and in your messenger groups. Contact us and send a WhatsApp message to the following number: +491633378340.

You are also invited to join the joint online meeting of the Transport Workers, Public Service and Postal Action Committees on Tuesday, June 27, at 8 p.m. We want to discuss how a common struggle, independent of the unions, can be implemented. You can find the link to the meeting here.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact