

# Deutsche Bahn workers demand resignation of union executive following arbitration result

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*We call on all railway workers to register using the form below or to send a Whatsapp message to +491633378340 to get in touch with like-minded workers and start building an action committee at Deutsche Bahn.*

Last week, the conciliation commission in the wages dispute at national rail carrier Deutsche Bahn presented the result of arbitration between the employers and union. There is outrage about this among the members of the railway and transport union (EVG). The proposed wage increases, and the duration of the contract, do not differ noticeably from the employers' last offer and represent a substantial reduction in real wages. If this arbitration award is accepted, a railway worker will earn on average about 15 percent less in real terms when the contract expires in spring 2025 than in September 2020.

Apparently, there are further deteriorations, but the EVG is keeping them strictly under wraps. The union is only disclosing the contents it has selected itself from the 140-page conciliation agreement, which its negotiators concocted behind closed doors with the Deutsche Bahn board.

This practice of only publishing so-called “highlights,” which unions in the US and other countries also resort to in order to impose poverty wages, is being criticised heavily by many rail workers.

Michael H., who apparently has seen 73 pages of the agreement that the EVG had briefly uploaded online only to take them off the internet again, wrote: “What other dirty tricks are in the documents? Is it known that the employee's notice period is partly extended from four weeks to six months? Is it known that Christmas bonuses will be reduced, leaving only €378? These are only two issues I found in a hurry, I'm sure there are more. Anyone who still agrees to this has simply not understood what the EVG is doing to us.”

At a members' conference on Tuesday, EVG negotiator Frank Hauenstein announced that the remaining contents of the conciliation agreement would only be published after the conclusion of the members' vote. According to Hauenstein,

the union's “hands are tied when it comes to passing on information.”

If the EVG has its way, the economic fate of hundreds of thousands of railway workers and their families will be decided in a backroom conspiracy between the former government politicians Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democrat), for Deutsche Bahn and Heide Pfarr (Social Democrat), for EVG, and the leaders of EVG and Deutsche Bahn.

The EVG federal executive committee has already given its recommendation to the mediation result. In order to overrule this recommendation and reject it, 75 percent of railway workers would have to vote “No” in the strike ballot that starts at the end of the week and runs until the end of August.

With the support of the *World Socialist Web Site*, tram drivers, rail workers and other transport workers have formed a rank-and-file action committee calling on all EVG members to do just that and withdraw the EVG's negotiating mandate. Instead, action committees must be built on the railways and at all other transport companies where workers can organise their struggle across all union lines and national boundaries.

When the EVG announced the ballot after the “failure” of collective bargaining at the end of June, the action committee issued a statement criticising the union bureaucracy's “double game” and warning that the EVG was preparing a sell-out behind the backs of its membership. The conciliation result, supported by the EVG board, fully confirms this warning and shows that railway workers face a tough political struggle that must be directed not only against the Deutsche Bahn board but also against the EVG bureaucracy. Their allies in this fight are public service and postal workers—where the Verdi union plays the same role as the EVG—and the striking transport workers across Europe.

The WSWs article entitled “Vote against the arbitrator's decision and for an indefinite strike!” has already been read well over 8,000 times. Posts on social media reveal the enormous anger that exists among railway workers about the

EVG sellout. Thousands of comments condemning the arbitration result and the role of the EVG are gathering under the union's posts on social media.

A typical comment comes from Jens on Instagram: "You have to let this roll off your tongue: A final conciliation agreement is declared as a positive conciliation decision, when the result of the 'conciliation decision' is worse than the starting point of the conciliation," he writes, referring to an offer that the EVG had previously rejected during collective bargaining.

Laura D. wrote on Facebook: "I'm sorry, but this is what is thrown at us after months and now we have the floor? You have unfortunately folded more and more month after month and the employer has achieved what they wanted—and that is: no strikes in the summer. I feel let down by the statements at the beginning of the negotiations and now by the EVG. Credibility looks different to this. Apart from that, as a long-time employee I don't see anything from the inflation premium because I've 'unfortunately' been on parental leave for a whole year since June 1. I and many others would have expected a deal that would better secure us for the future—especially for pensions."

Workers are particularly outraged by the division of the workforce agreed in the additional "structural adjustments." While the conciliation result recommended by the EVG means painful reductions in real wages for all occupational groups, the differences in nominal wage increases are immense. For example, according to EVG, train drivers and dispatchers only get an average nominal increase of 12.3 and 8.8 percent respectively over 25 months because they do not receive this structural adjustment.

The EVG had justified the discrepancy in nominal wage increases in a comment by saying that function group 4 (train drivers) was already at the "highest level" of all groups. But in previous years, their pay hardly increased at all or remained frozen—under the pretext of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Obviously, the EVG is speculating that at least 25 percent of its membership will accept the poor result out of sheer desperation and is using the "higher" wage increases for train supervisors and train dispatchers with the help of the structural adjustments as bait. This deliberately divisive function of the arbitration result is attacked by many workers.

René, for example, wrote on Instagram: "I am a train driver and a member of the EVG. I have always defended you [the union] to my colleagues. But to recommend this arbitration result is incomprehensible to me. 'Together we can do more'? I don't see any more togetherness. For me, that's probably it for the EVG. You can't really be serious. I'm pissed off and really disappointed that you really don't

give a damn about the train drivers."

Many train conductors and dispatchers have expressed their solidarity with train drivers and dispatchers. For example, Serkan Ö. wrote: "I benefit from the deal but will still refuse out of solidarity. Either everyone gets it, or no one does."

Ralf T. demanded on Facebook: "This [union] federal board should resign immediately. A federal executive committee that talks about 'solidarity' and 'only together are we strong,' about 'we won't let ourselves be divided' and then doesn't have the courage to unanimously reject an arbitrator's decision that aims at exactly this division, should be deprived of power. You had it in your own hands."

On Twitter, John D. wrote: "Who needs a union like this? Is that what all the fuss is for? The EVG is indeed a railway union, but not a railway workers' union."

And Yannik O. commented on Facebook: "My resignation from this employers' union will come in the next few weeks. I hope others will follow. What you're pulling here can't be surpassed in audacity. What was that again? Together we are strong! Don't make me laugh!"

Like Yannik, many EVG members are announcing that they will leave the union now the arbitration result is known. Andreas S. writes that the result was not a compromise. "It is a caving in to the employer. The main thing [for the union] is not to go on strike. That was your goal from the beginning anyway. If I can't expect more pay as a train driver, I'll just have to cancel my membership. That way I can at least get a small pay rise."

And Marcus B. wrote: "It is unfortunately time to think about saying goodbye after more than 30 years of membership and many years of active work. This recommendation is a slap in the face of all members."

This anger at the EVG is justified. But to unite all railway workers in a common struggle, anger alone is not enough. The way forward is shown by workers at Deutsche Post and in public services, who have formed action committees independent of the union. Workers around the world are taking up the fight against the class war policies that the capitalist elites and their governments are using to finance their next world war.



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