

Why railway workers in Germany should reject the arbitration agreement being recommended by the EVG union

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After strong protests by many members and several local groups, the EVG railway and transport union was forced to publish the full text of an arbitration/conciliation recommendation which it had initially refused to make available.

At a general meeting last week, EVG executive board member Frank Hauenstein had declared that the wording of the 140-page arbitration agreement was confidential. At the end of the mediation process, all the parties had agreed to maintain silence, and his hands were “unfortunately tied.” The EVG executive only wanted to put its summary of the “recommendation” to the vote. When members objected, only then did the EVG leadership give in.

An analysis of the conciliation agreement makes clear why the union wanted to hide it from its members: it is a slap in the face for EVG members, who are being systematically divided up according to company, occupational group and even within occupational groups.

We call on all railway workers to take action now and participate in building an independent rank-and-file action committee to reject the arbitration recommendation. The campaign for a No vote must be made a prelude to a rebellion against the EVG leadership.

Join the online meeting next Tuesday evening, August 15, 7p.m., to constitute the action committee and take further steps in the fight against the EVG sell-out. To do so, get in touch via Whatsapp at this number +49-163-337-8340 or also register via the form at the end of this article.

The arbitration recommendation that the EVG board under Martin Burkert and Cosima Ingenschay (both Social Democrats, SPD) wants to push through is full of attacks on wages and working conditions.

Even the framework of the arbitration, which the EVG announced and cheered from the beginning, makes it clear that all occupational groups will face huge real-wage cuts.

Pay would be frozen for at least the first eight months of the new contract. The first new money is the €2,850 “inflation compensation” for full-time workers. Apprentices and students undergoing work practice will only receive a bonus of €1,425. After that wages and salaries will be increased by €200 a month from December 2023 and then by €210 only in August 2024. The contract term is 25 months, running until the end of March 2025.

In view of the low pay settlements in 2020, as well as the continuing high inflation, these are huge reductions in real wages.

Considering that many workers spend most of their income on food, energy and rent, they will have lost a fifth or even a quarter of their real income by the beginning of 2025.

Now, after the publication of the full text of the arbitration recommendation, including the “small print,” it becomes obvious that numerous special agreements have been made, which make a mockery of the EVG’s slogan, “Together stays together.”

Only a minority of employees, namely those who in the past did not choose to take additional holidays instead of wage increases, will receive the €410 highly acclaimed by the bureaucracy. Due to increasingly difficult working conditions, most railway workers have chosen six, many even twelve additional days and have foregone wage increases.

Now, they are being deprived of about 2.6 percent, and those with twelve additional days of leave even lose 5.2 percent of the increase in basic rates. They will therefore not receive €410, but €399 and €389 respectively.

Allowances and holiday pay will also only be increased by 4 percent on December 1, 2023 and August 1, 2024, and not as usual on a percentage basis, which has to be calculated for each employee.

The “inflation compensation payment” (€2,850 for full-time employees, €1,450 for trainees and work placement students), which will be paid out in October at the earliest, will only be paid in full to those who have received remuneration from the railway continuously between March and October 2023. Accordingly, no special payment will be made to employees on sick leave or parental leave. For each month that the employee was not in receipt of remuneration from the railways during this period, €310 will be deducted (€155 for trainees and work placement students). For part-time employees, the bonus is reduced proportionally.

Employees who have decided to leave the railways will go completely empty-handed: “If employees have left before 25 October 2023, there is no entitlement to payment of the inflation compensation bonus.” Those in the early release phase of their partial retirement work are also not entitled to the inflation compensation payment at all (page 54).

For long-serving employees to leave DB at short notice is made more difficult by an extension of the employer’s notice periods to employees. Colleagues who have worked at the railway for ten years or more now have a notice period of six months (page 102).

What potential new employer will go along with that?

The following agreements also mean considerable deterioration in some cases:

- The starting age for partial retirement is to be raised to 61; previously employees could make use of it from 59 (page 13).

- The minimum of 12 rest days per year, to which everyone is entitled as a free weekend—at least 60 hours long—now also count if the start of the free weekend is “postponed by up to 2 hours as a result of delays in the last driving performance”, e.g., even if one does not finish the shift until 2 a.m. on Friday night—and is then still far from home (page 74).

- Special working-time regulations have been agreed for the on-board catering sector. Until now, one shift per calendar week could be 12 hours, two shifts were possible with the approval of the works council. Now the maximum shift length is to be increased to 15 hours. In “cross-border traffic or—with the consent of the works council—for employment policy reasons” they are to be able to be extended even further. And not just once or at most twice a week, but three times a week. With the consent of the works council, workers should even be able to be obliged to work four of these mega-shifts (page 122).

Moreover, some skilled groups fare even worse than others. The professional groups 1 (skilled workers), 3 (driving service providers) and 5 (train supervisors) receive separate wage increases at the end (!) of the 25-month contract term in the form of “structural adjustments.” According to the EVG, these range between 18.7 percent and 27.6 percent.

The professional groups 2 (shunting attendants), 4 (train drivers) and 6 (steward on-board catering) will not receive these. Groups 2 and 6 will be postponed until a corresponding agreement is reached in the next collective bargaining negotiations in 2025. The train drivers do not even receive this promise.

This division of EVG members also extends to the individual DB companies. Many colleagues at DB subsidiaries are expected to put up with additional attacks.

- Employees at DB’s regional bus companies will have to work one hour more per week. That is 4 to 5 hours a month or 6 days a year. In addition, newly hired workers will only receive marginal wage increases if the EVG has its way. They will not receive €410 in two steps, but two pay increases of 4 percent, 5 percent or 6 percent, depending on their wage group. Accordingly, the upper wage groups will only have an increase of 8 percent over the next 25 months (page 46). A two-tier system is being introduced into the workforce!

- For DB Netze AG, “voluntary working time increases” are to be introduced, up to 2,192 hours a year, which means that 42-hour weeks will become permanently possible. (page 15).

- The wage increases at DB Dialog are only 5 percent, 6 percent or 7 percent in two steps, depending on the wage group. The upper wage groups will therefore only receive a ten percent pay increase by March 2025 (page 26).

- At DB Cargo AG, “mainline and foreign locomotive drivers as well as specialist trainers ... are to be deployed multifunctionally in future.” They are to carry out technical examinations on goods trains and “drive traction units and/or shunting locomotives within stations and/or sidings with the aid of radio remote control” (page

11 as well as pages 58ff).

- DB Cargo also wants to introduce the “work in cycles” model as soon as possible. This allows for up to ten-day away-from-home work cycles. This model is “voluntary” (page 11 as well as pages 68ff).

The conciliation recommendation makes it unmistakably clear that the EVG and its executive board are completely on the side of DB management and the government.

EVG leader Martin Burkert has been switching back and forth between the EVG, or its predecessors, and the SPD for 35 years. He sat in the Bundestag for the SPD for 15 years—from 2005 to 2020. Burkert is deputy chairman of the supervisory board of DB AG and also sits on the supervisory boards of DB Regio AG and S-Bahn Berlin GmbH.

His deputy, Cosima Ingenschay, is also a member of the SPD, sits on the presidium of the SPD’s railways works groups, also on the supervisory board of DB AG and on that of DB Station & Service AG and DB Cargo AG. The other board members, such as Kristian Loroeh and Frank Hauenstein, also sit on the supervisory boards of DB companies and together receive hundreds of thousands of euros in royalties.

On the supervisory boards they work together with the representatives of the railway owner. Since the railway belongs to the federal government, these are numerous members of the Bundestag, state secretaries and ministry representatives of the governing parties.

The EVG executive is closely linked to the government and supports its pro-war policies and military build-up. While the €100 billion special budget for the military is being quietly increased to €300 billion, the EVG and the other DGB unions are passing on the costs of rearmament to the workers through cuts in real wages and social gains.

This community of conspirators is determined to enforce the arbitration recommendation with brute force. The EVG is threatening EVG members, warning them against rejecting the gagging clauses in the arbitration recommendation and not to vote “no” in the ballot. “Everything we have achieved so far,” the union warns, would then be gone. “Even the inflation compensation bonus. If there is an indefinite strike, we start all over again.”

Railway workers can only fight against this blackmail if they organise themselves independently of the EVG—and also the GDL.

We therefore once again call on all railway workers to take part in the online meeting next Tuesday evening, August 15, 7 p.m., to constitute the action committee and take the necessary steps. Get in touch via Whatsapp at this number +49-163-337 8340 or also register via the following form.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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