

“We cannot allow a sellout”

Growing resistance to sellout arbitration recommendation by German rail union

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There is growing anger and resistance among rail workers against the sellout that the EVG rail union is preparing with the results of its recent arbitration with the Deutsche Bahn (the German rail company). The latest WSWs articles on the arbitrator’s ruling were read by tens of thousands and widely shared by workers on social media and among their colleagues. Individual local and company groups of the EVG published statements calling for rejection of the arbitration offer.

Many rail workers contacted the WSWs in recent days to help build the rank-and-file committee that will begin its work at the online meeting at 7 p.m. on Tuesday and to which all who want to prevent the sellout by the EVG leadership are invited.

WSWS reporters have been discussing the arbitration outcome with workers outside rail operations and EVG informational events over the past week. “It is good that you are promoting a strike and against the arbitration result. We cannot allow a sellout,” was the typical reaction of a worker outside the Rummelsburg depot in Berlin.

“At the DB Netz Werk Oberbaustoffe Witten works, everyone got a copy of the article. And very many are of the same opinion that it can’t work this way,” reported another worker.

Jens, a worker from the Rummelsburg plant, whom WSWs reporters met in front of an EVG-Berlin information event, reported, “Our department from the workshop is completely against it. It’s too long, we have no staff and wages are not rising at all. ... Here in Rummelsburg, we said that when the arbitration result comes in, we’ll quit the EVG.”

The EVG does not represent the interests of its members. Hansen is “the best example.” Norbert

Hansen (Social Democrats, SPD) was chairman of the Transnet union, the predecessor of EVG, until 2008 and was responsible for numerous derisory wage agreements. He first sat on the supervisory board of Deutsche Bahn and was later appointed its head of human resources.

Regarding the arbitration result, one worker said, “Nothing has changed from before. It is really a mockery of our work. There is no other way to put it. There is money at the top of the board, and there is nothing at the bottom. That’s the biggest affront.”

He is also concerned about the impact on retirement benefits. “After all, we also want to try to get something out in the direction of retirement, that you can retire earlier. After all, who is going to be able to work on the shop floor until 67?” The current arbitration ruling is intended to raise the age of entry into special part-time work (partial retirement) from 59 to 61. The worker notes that these are international issues: “If you look at what’s going on in France with pensions, they’re fighting for a better pension. We are being held back by the union.” Regarding a joint struggle with workers in France, he explains, “That would be the best thing.”

Other workers outside the event denounced the divisive role of the arbitration result. “The main point that convinced me to be here today is that the solidarity principle is canceled, that functional groups are excluded,” said one of them. “I have not been a union member for over 40 years for that. For me, it’s ‘Wehret den Anfängen’ (retain our origins). It’s a division of the union.”

He went on to report, “We did the math on this: It’s ultimately a real wage loss.” For a colleague of his,

there would be a “loss of 1,000 euro at the end of the day.”

“I’m going to reject it,” a colleague agreed with him. “The conditions we agreed on beforehand have mostly not been met and in reality the arbitration went in the employer’s favor. If you look at the offer before and after the arbitration, it’s almost identical. So 10 euro more. And I think it’s much worse that the payment won’t come until December. The payment has to go back to May; it has to be paid retroactively. Inflation is digging into employees’ wallets in a bad way, and we took cuts in the last round, too, which we’ll have to make up for financially at some point.”

On the impact the arbitrator’s ruling would have on workers at DB subsidiaries, he explained, “Well, it’s definitely an indictment that not even the statutory minimum wage has been paid in the company so far. So I found that really horrifying.”

A worker spoken to by WSWS reporters outside the Rummelsburg depot gave a more detailed account of working conditions. He himself works in the cleaning department. “We are getting fewer and fewer employees, but more and more trains are to be thoroughly cleaned in a shorter time. That’s not possible at all. When I started, you could still joke with colleagues at work. That’s no longer possible. They work you to the bone at work. We refer to the works as a bone mill.”

He said of the works council: “I don’t even go to that kindergarten anymore. You don’t get any answers there. They’ll sign any duty roster.” Before he was permanently employed by DB, he had worked as a temporary employee. “Here at DB, my hourly wage is worse,” he reported.

Opposition to the arbitration recommendation is widespread and is also expressed in resolutions of entire company and local groups of the EVG.

The EVG works group at DB Cargo in Mannheim criticized, among other things, “the proposed differences between the function groups,” which “lead to a division of DB employees and EVG members.” The result is also “far removed from our original demands of 650 euro over a period of 12 months.” “The DB Cargo Mannheim works group therefore unanimously decided on August 8 to recommend that its members reject the mediation offer.”

The EVG national executive board responded to the

recommendation of the DB Cargo works group in Frankfurt by warning in an open letter of the consequences of a strike and threatening EVG members. “In the event of an indefinite strike, we lose everything and start from scratch again.” Everything that has been achieved so far “would then be gone. Even the inflation compensation bonus.”

This letter was sent by mail to all EVG members at the beginning of the ballot. The WSWS already answered this letter comprehensively and stressed that workers must not be intimidated. The first task of action committees at the railroads is “to prevent a sellout by the EVG and to fight for an indefinite strike.”

We call on railroad workers to contact us. Join the online meeting on Tuesday, August 15, 7:00 p.m. to constitute the action committee and take further steps in the fight against the EVG sellout. To do so, contact us via WhatsApp at this number: +49-163-337 8340.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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