

Rail workers in Germany can place no trust in the union leadership! Join the Rail Action Committee!

Rail Action Committee
27 November 2023

The following letter from the Rail Action Committee is addressed to all members of the GDL train drivers' union.

Dear colleagues of the GDL,

The Rail Action Committee stands firmly by your side in the current wage dispute. Our action committee organises railway workers, both union members and non-members. It was founded during the strike by members of the EVG rail and transit workers' union because we are no longer prepared to accept the domination of the EVG apparatus. GDL members also took part in our first meetings in the course of our contract bargaining struggle to express their solidarity.

We therefore invite you to join our online meeting next Tuesday evening at 7 p.m. to discuss together how we can achieve better and, above all, safe working conditions and decent wages for all of us.

Despite the rapid escalation of negotiations between the GDL and Deutsche Bahn, you, too, can only assert your justified demands against the union leadership, not with it.

The reduction of the working week from 38 to 35 hours for shift workers with full pay compensation and a €555 pay rise for everyone over a period of 12 months, as demanded by the GDL, are the absolute minimum we need. Working conditions are getting worse and worse, inflation in the last two years is already officially around 13 percent and the GDL's collective agreement for the last few years has been abysmal; €555 does not even compensate for the real wage losses of recent years.

Against this backdrop, Deutsche Bahn's offer of an 11 percent wage increase over a 32-month period and its categorical rejection of a reduction in working hours

is an open provocation. Behind this stands the German government, which owns 100 percent of Deutsche Bahn.

The problem is that the executive boards of the EVG and GDL do not differ on any fundamental issues: Both subordinate our interests—those of all rail workers—to the economic interests of the railway company and the political interests of the German government.

The EVG does this quite openly and it betrayed and sold us out in the last wages dispute. To this end, it has divided up the individual workforces of the subsidiaries and, above all, the various occupational groups. In particular, it put pressure on the lower wage groups with a one-off payment (inflation compensation payment).

However, the GDL and its leader, Claus Weselsky, are looking for a deal that they can sell as a success and that does not jeopardise the “profitability of the railways.” In the context of the absurd proposal for the union to set up a separate temporary employment agency called Fair Train eG, Weselsky, a member of the Christian Democratic Union, emphasised that every company must operate economically.

This is the attitude that is determining the wage negotiations. Even before these began, he declared: “We have never reached an agreement that fulfills one hundred percent of our demands.” And last week, he assured the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*: “The GDL has never gone on strike over Christmas and will not do so this year either. The Christmas period is a peaceful one—and it will remain so.”

The GDL is neither willing nor able to wage a principled battle. Weselsky assures the employers and government: “We are not engaged in class warfare, but

in a market economy.”

This is precisely the argument put forward by Deutsche Bahn and its chief negotiator, human resources head Martin Seiler. Reducing working hours would require 10 percent more train drivers, he says, which is neither affordable nor possible given the current shortage of skilled workers. “If we were to fulfill the GDL’s demands, our personnel costs would rise by over 50 percent,” adding that “nothing, but nothing at all can justify that.”

While Seiler is offering you a reduction in real wages, last year the Deutsche Bahn Executive Board authorised salaries of over €8.5 million, including €2.2 million for DB boss Richard Lutz alone. Seiler himself more than doubled his salary last year to €1.394 million.

For years, the Management Board has also allowed the railway to deteriorate, neglecting us employees and imposing ever greater burdens on us. We are paying for the dilapidated lines and the increasing pressures with our incomes and increasingly with our lives.

The majority of you in the GDL are train drivers. As such, you have enormous power, as you well know. Your 20-hour warning strike the week before last showed once again that if you want, rail transport will come to a standstill. And you have proven that you want it!

This is precisely why GDL head Claus Weselsky is now reacting in such an escalatory manner. After the second round of negotiations on Thursday last week, he declared the wage negotiations to have failed. The GDL had already initiated a ballot for indefinite strikes. Just like the warning strikes, these are manoeuvres intended to prevent an all-out strike instead of preparing for one. The GDL states that the result of the ballot will not be available until shortly before Christmas, but at the same time, Weselsky assures all and sundry that there will be no strikes over Christmas.

Just as at Deutsche Post/DHL, where the Verdi union did not go on strike despite just under 86 percent voting in favor, the GDL ballot serves primarily as a bargaining chip in its search for a rotten compromise.

This must stop now; it must not continue. The guiding principle must be that the interests of the workers take precedence over the profit claims of Deutsche Bahn and the cuts targets of the federal government.

After all, the coalition government, with the support of all the parties in the Bundestag (parliament)—from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) to the Left Party—is in the process of using the federal budget to impose a war economy. Without any hesitation, they have allocated €100 billion for military armament and are supplying Ukraine and now Israel to fuel murderous wars and war crimes. Every company that complains about high energy costs or supply chain bottlenecks or, like the chip manufacturers, simply rudely demands subsidies, receives billions in support.

And we are expected to pay for this through falling real wages, cuts in social spending and savings in infrastructure—including the railways. The decision by the Supreme Court ruling that the government’s €60 billion climate fund is unconstitutional will further accelerate this.

Against all this, we must build the Rail Action Committee to unite us with railway workers around the world who are facing the same problems.

An all-out strike to realise your demands can only be achieved by yourselves—the rank-and-file union members. This is exactly what needs to be prepared now. We therefore invite all rail workers, especially GDL locomotive drivers, to join our Rail Action Committee. Get in touch via Whatsapp on +49-163-337 8340 and register using the form below if you would like to join the action committee.

Take part in our online meeting on Tuesday evening at 7 p.m.



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