

To all members of the GDL (Union of German Locomotive Drivers)

Take the strike into your own hands! Join the Railway Workers' Rank-and-File Committee!

German Railworkers' Action Committee
3 January 2024

The following letter to railway workers in Germany was sent by the Rail Action Committee.

Dear colleagues in the Union of German Locomotive Drivers (GDL),

The Rail Action Committee fully supports your strike. We are railroad employees, both union members and not, who founded the independent Rank-and-File committee during the Railway and Transport Union (EVG) strike because we were no longer prepared to accept the domination of the EVG apparatus.

We invite you to join our online meeting next Tuesday, January 9, 2024, at 7 p.m., German time. Let us discuss how we can secure better and above all safer working conditions and appropriate wages for all of us.

Your strike, starting January 8, is more than justified. The last wage settlements and high inflation have devoured our wages. We are paying for the dangerously decaying lines and the continuing staff shortages with greater work stress, and more and more of us are paying with our lives.

The offer that Deutsche Bahn (DB, the German Rail Company) has made to you can therefore only be described as a provocation. The 11 percent wage increase over a period of 32 months means further real wage cuts. The demand for a reduction in working hours from 38 to 35 hours per week is rejected outright by the Deutsche Bahn Executive Board, which refuses to even consider it.

Your strike is the appropriate response.

Ninety-seven percent of you voted in favor of an indefinite strike in the ballot held shortly before Christmas. However, the GDL and its chairman, Claus Weselsky, are not even considering an indefinite strike.

Following your second 24-hour strike at the

beginning of December, the GDL assured Deutsche Bahn that it would not hold any strikes over the Christmas season, up to and including the first week of January.

Shortly after your perfectly clear vote for an indefinite strike, Weselsky declared that he would not organize an indefinite strike. "We will go on strike for three to a maximum of five days," he emphasized to the *Rheinische Post*. An indefinite strike, Weselsky said, would not be right in view of "the economic consequences. We will live up to our responsibility."

That is perfectly clear! It is the economic consequences of a strike for the company that determine the actions of the GDL union apparatus, not the interests of union members. This is the meaning of Weselsky's statement: "We are not engaged in class warfare, but in the market economy."

The reason for this is simple: a member of the Christian Democrats (CDU), Weselsky supports the war and austerity policies of the ruling coalition government. The German government is cutting billions from social benefits, basic public services and social infrastructure, including the railroads, in order to finance its military build-up, the war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Deutsche Bahn managers are enjoying salaries measured in millions. Last year, the eight-member Management Board received over €8.5 million, €2.2 million of which went to DB boss Richard Lutz alone. Chief negotiator Martin Seiler—formerly a union official with the postal workers' union and the services union Verdi—more than doubled his previous salary to around €1.4 million. Moreover, the Deutsche Bahn board members are now to be back-paid bonuses

of almost €5 million for 2022. Weselsky can bluster about it all he likes: this is his market economy!

We, the employees at Deutsche Bahn and everywhere else, are expected to pay for this self-enrichment of the managers, just as we pay for militarization, through higher taxes and contributions and real cuts in wages.

On this fundamental issue, the executive boards of EVG and GDL do not differ at all: both subordinate our interests—those of all rail employees—to the economic interests of the rail company and the political interests of the federal government.

The EVG is doing this openly, betraying and selling us out in the last round of collective bargaining. To do it, EVG divided the workforces of the individual subsidiaries, especially by dividing the workforce into occupational groups. In particular, it used a one-off inflation compensation payment to put pressure on the lower wage groups.

The GDL and its leader, Claus Weselsky, are also trying to conclude a deal that they can spin as a success but that does not jeopardize the “profitability of the railroad.”

He is therefore appealing to the German government to intervene in the wage dispute. The head of the GDL demands that Federal Transport Minister Volker Wissing (of the liberal Free Democrats, FDP) should “kick out the executive board” or at least “take it to task.” The FDP minister, whose party stands like no other for the unscrupulous enrichment of the wealthy, “should cut the board’s bonuses and finally set targets that are measurable and short-term.” Then we could “talk about bonuses again.”

The German government is not our ally against the DB Management Board. On the contrary: as the owner of Deutsche Bahn, it stands behind the Board and dictates the line to chief negotiator Seiler and DB boss Lutz.

As DB employees, we are therefore not only confronted with a few corrupt “bad apples” on the DB Management Board. We are confronted with the federal government and the capitalist profit system, which Weselsky always euphemistically refers to as the “market economy.” The developments of the last years have shown that our interests as rail workers are incompatible with the drive for profit and the politics of war.

Your strike is therefore of the greatest importance. It

must become the starting point for the mobilization of all railroad workers, and beyond. In opposition to the union bureaucrats who are dividing us, our perspective is that of a common struggle by all rail workers, regardless of their union affiliation.

Such a struggle is part of a growing movement around the world. The year 2023 saw massive strike waves across Europe and worldwide there were mass protests against war and the genocide in Gaza. We can only achieve our demands as part of this mobilization. As an Action Committee, we are in close contact with rail colleagues in the Rank-and-File Committees in the UK and the US, as well as workers around the world. It is vital to unite these struggles.

Your strike is an important step in this development. In order to enforce your demands and prevent the GDL executive board from selling out the strike, an indefinite full strike is necessary. Only you—the union members—can enforce this strike. This is what must now be prepared.

We invite all rail employees, especially GDL locomotive drivers, to join our Rail Action Committee. Get in touch via WhatsApp at +49-163-337 8340 and register using the form below if you want to take part in the Action Committee.

The Rail Action Committee is based on two principles:

- Our social interests, those of all rail employees and their families, take precedence over the profit interests of the corporation. Good wages instead of seven-figure bonuses and austerity measures!
- For the international unification and cooperation of all rail employees. We will not be divided, neither by union affiliation nor by nationality. We are confronted with similar problems in every country.

Take part in our online meeting on Tuesday, January 9, 2024, at 7 p.m.



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