# Fifth “warning strike” by German train drivers: GDL union leader Weselsky refuses to call all-out strike

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The GDL train drivers’ union is organising a warning strike for the fifth time in the current wages dispute. But once again, the GDL leadership under Claus Weselsky has limited the strike to just 35 hours, running from 2 a.m. next Thursday until 1 p.m. on Friday. The strike in freight transport will begin on Wednesday.

The Rail Action Committee, which organises union and nonunion railway workers, held a meeting Tuesday evening to discuss taking the strike out of the hands of the bureaucracy, making it the starting point for a broad movement against real wage cuts and intolerable working conditions.

Four weeks ago, the GDL leadership called off a lengthy warning strike prematurely, claiming that there were clear signals from Deutsche Bahn (DB) executives that serious negotiations were underway. Secret negotiations were then held for a whole month, but the management and the government, which backs it as the ultimate company owner, did not shift an inch.

The GDL feigned indignation in a press release, saying that it had agreed to negotiate “behind closed doors” for four weeks to reach an agreement, but that the negotiations on the part of DB were “never conducted in a solution-orientated manner.” The “supposedly ‘enormous concessions’ made by the employer” were “on closer inspection often even a deterioration of the status quo,” the union said.

Despite far-reaching concessions made by the GDL, the DB Management Board had lacked “the will to conduct the negotiations successfully and with good compromises.” Weselsky scolded that “The railway board does not care about the legitimate interests of railway workers and has therefore itself caused the strike through the negotiations, so that no solution could be found,” adding, “The railway board is responsible for this new level of escalation and not the GDL.” The employer was driving its own employees onto the streets.

With the renewed failure of the negotiations, the train drivers’ wage dispute has reached a new stage. Two things are now absolutely clear.

Firstly, the management and federal government which owns the railways want to bring the train drivers to their knees and make an example of them. The “socio-political turn” announced by Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrat, SPD) at the Munich Security Conference a few weeks ago is being put into practice. It is intended to shift the costs of the military build-up onto the working class. Instead of social improvements, social conflict is the order of the day. Wage cuts, cuts in social spending and increased exploitation are no longer to be cushioned but brutally enforced.

Secondly, the GDL and the Weselsky leadership are not prepared to organise a principled fight for the train drivers’ justified demands. The GDL wants to prevent an open-ended all-out strike at all costs because it is closely linked to the establishment parties in the Bundestag (parliament) and supports their policies on all important issues.

This refusal to mobilise the full fighting power of the train drivers in an indefinite strike only encourages the DB board to launch new attacks and strengthens its provocative stance.

In the press release on the renewed mini-warning strike, Weselsky lists some of the concessions he has offered DB management and already agreed with more than two dozen smaller private railway companies. In the GDL’s proposal, there is hardly anything left of the original demands sought by workers.

In a ballot, 97 percent of members voted in favour of an indefinite strike to achieve the following: A reduction in

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the working week from 38 to 35 hours and a monthly wage increase of €555 for all, over a 12-month contract.

Instead, the following was agreed with private railway companies and offered to DB: €420 (in two instalments) for a period of 24 months—less than half the original demand. The introduction of the 35-hour week would take place gradually and only be achieved—if at all—by January 2028. In return, options for workers to take 12 days unpaid time off and to work reduced hours would no longer apply from January 1, 2026. Although the 12 days additional leave were effectively unpaid, many older workers took advantage of them.

The train drivers are confronted with the fact that there is no way forward with the GDL bureaucracy. In order to put an end to the repulsive begging and genuflection before the DB board and to develop the strength and self-confidence of the train drivers, the grip of the GDL apparatus must be broken and the organisation of the strike must be taken into their own hands.

Because DB's refusal to meet workers' demands is due to the government's decision to pass the costs of war onto the workers, the fight for a reduction in working hours, better working conditions and higher wages must be linked to the struggle against war and rearmament.

The renewed warning strike must be used to discuss a fundamental reorientation and reorganisation of the working class. It is necessary to build independent rank-and-file action committees, democratically organised and committed to the principled defence of workers' interests. This means that the rights and needs of workers and their families must take precedence over the profit interests of the corporations, shareholders and speculators. The pro-war policy of the government must be rejected.

Part of such a reorientation must be to establish close international cooperation with workers around the world. All social problems today take on global forms. Workers all over the world face the same or similar problems and can only solve them through international cooperation and the coordination of cross-border struggles.

Across Europe, strikes and protest movements are becoming increasingly political. They are not only against government austerity programmes, but also against the pro-war policy. The coalition government of the SPD, Liberal Democrats and Greens has presented an austerity and war budget for 2024, for which workers are expected to pay.

In this situation, train drivers, rail workers and all workers can only assert their legitimate interests against the trade union leaders, who all support the governments' policies of austerity and war.

The Rail Action Committee has explained this in its statement "Rail workers in Germany can place no trust in the union leadership! Join the Rail Action Committee!" The statement declared: "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.' ... The GDL is neither willing nor able to wage a principled battle."

This has now clearly proved to be true.

When it was founded early last summer, the action committee adopted two basic principles:

> First, we stand for the principled defense of workers' rights. This means that the rights and needs of workers and their families take precedence over the profit interests of investors, shareholders and speculators.
>
> Second, we strive for international unification and cooperation. We deliberately address our call to permanent and temporary workers, colleagues of all nationalities, regardless of whether they are members of a trade union or not. We will not be divided! For us, international cooperation and the coordination of international struggles are of the highest importance.

To build independent action committees together with us, contact us via Whatsapp at +49-163-337 8340 and register using the form below.

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