

German train drivers' union appoints reactionary law-and-order man to head Fair Train, its temporary employment operation

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Fair Train, an agency employment firm founded by the train drivers' union GDL, elected Rainer Wendt as the new chairman of its Supervisory Board on March 25. Wendt takes the place of Mario Reiss, who is to replace Claus Weselsky at the head of the GDL.

Wendt has been chairman of the German Police Union (DPolG) since 2007, which, like the GDL, is part of the German Civil Service Union (DBB). However, he has made a name for himself not as a trade union leader but as an ultra-right law-and-order politician.

There are few other public figures who advocate beefing up the powers of the state apparatus, the restriction of democratic rights and a racist immigration policy as frequently and emphatically as Rainer Wendt. He is not a member of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), having belonged to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) since the 1970s and, as he lives in Munich, to the Christian Social Union (CSU) since the 1980s. But with his political views, he would be at home in the AfD.

In two books, *Germany Is Being Left Behind* and *Germany in Danger*, Wendt paints a picture of a "weak" state that is the result of the immigration of hundreds of thousands of refugees "who don't know our culture or have a deep contempt for it."

As an antidote, he calls for the establishment of a police state. "A weak state cannot protect the people who live within its borders. And that's why we must stop weakening Germany further. Because our country is no longer safe, which is why we need a strong state," he writes in the introduction to *Deutschland in Gefahr* (*Germany in Danger*, 2016).

In 2016, Wendt played a key role in circulating the

lying propaganda about immigrants terrorising visitors on "New Year's Eve in Cologne" and gave interviews to far-right publications such as *Compact* magazine and *Junge Freiheit*. He is in favour of the hermetic sealing of Europe's borders against refugees, the expansion of data retention and the tightening of the trespass law and has defended the blanket surveillance of all citizens by the US National Security Agency.

He wants to equip the police with rubber bullets and electroshock weapons and use them ruthlessly. "Police resources must be weapons that hurt, only then will they work," he said when defending a brutal police operation against demonstrators protesting the controversial Stuttgart21 construction project. In 2016, he accused the chairwoman of the Legal Affairs Committee of being a "parliamentary smart arse" because she had criticised the shooting of a 17-year-old man on a rampage by SEK (Special Task Force) police officers and called on her not to interfere in police work.

Wendt also hit the headlines when Frankfurt's Goethe University disinvited him to speak in 2017 following fierce protests against his racist views. Two years later, a storm of public protest prevented his appointment as state secretary in the Saxony-Anhalt Interior Ministry. State Premier Reiner Haseloff (CDU) had wanted to entrust him with control of the entire apparatus of the security authorities.

Recently, Wendt has attacked those protesting the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. "The radical Islamists are asking the question of power on our streets, and we have to answer it in our favour, otherwise it will no longer be the Basic Law [Constitution] that rules, but Sharia law," he told *Bild* tabloid.

Why was this right-wing extremist agitator appointed to head Fair Train? The answer to this question says a lot about the role of Fair Train and the character of the GDL.

The WSWS already refuted Weselsky's claim last summer that setting up a cooperative to hire and loan train drivers to the railway companies would solve their problems. "The opposite is the case," we wrote, "The cooperative is a trap and every train driver should be aware of it. It marks a new stage in the transformation of trade unions into tools of the big corporations and into companies exploiting the workers themselves."

Wendt's election to head the Supervisory Board of Fair Train confirms this warning. Anyone familiar with the history of the labour movement knows that the defence of social gains and the defence of democratic rights are inextricably linked. A police state is ultimately always directed against the working class. It serves to suppress any form of social and political opposition to the domination of capital.

In our last article on Fair Train, we wrote that the GDL's move "effectively amounts to dividing the railway workforce and banning them from striking. The outsourcing to a temporary employment agency drives a wedge between the train drivers and the other railway employees and thus undermines any joint struggle."

With the election of Wendt as chairman of the Supervisory Board, it is becoming clearer that a strike-breaking organisation is being deliberately set up in order to stab other railway workers in the back if industrial action is taken.

Claus Weselsky has long cultivated the image of a militant trade unionist by ranting against the Deutsche Bahn management, organising one- or two-day strikes and allowing himself to be portrayed as an enemy by the media. But he has always refused to call an all-out full strike, even when this was supported by a majority of his members, made sure that the limited strikes did not spread to other areas, and finally agreed on settlements that were in some cases lower than those of the EVG, Deutsche Bahn's in-house union.

In this respect, the most recent collective agreement agreed massive concessions. What Weselsky grandiosely describes as a reduction in working hours with full pay compensation is in fact the opposite: a reduction in real wages and an open-ended "working time corridor" that leads to longer working hours and

lower pay.

Weselsky has been working with Wendt, whom he describes as a "friend," for a long time. It can be assumed that the initiative to place the law-and-order man at the head of Fair Train came from Weselsky. Wendt, as he himself admits, is not a railway or train driver expert—apart from the fact that he sometimes travels by train and once held a rail discount card.

The GDL is following the same path as all the trade unions. Deprived of the opportunity to negotiate limited reforms within a national framework by the dominance of global financial institutions and corporations, they have turned into company policemen. While asset values and share prices are rising, they are responsible for falling wages, job cuts and increasing workloads. They are fully behind the government's pro-war policy and help it to pass the costs of rearmament and war onto the working class.

The appointment of the ultra-right-wing policeman Rainer Wendt as head of a "cooperative" founded by a "trade union," which makes a profit by hiring out its own members to the railways, is symptomatic of this process.

In order to break the stranglehold of the unions and defend jobs, incomes and social rights, independent rank-and-file action committees must be set up in which the workers themselves have their say. The Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties have created the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to facilitate and coordinate this step internationally.

Get in touch with the Rail Action Committee via WhatsApp on +49-163-337 8340 and register using the form below.



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