

Is Deutsche Bahn Cargo covering up a potentially fatal on-the-job injury in Mannheim?

German Railworkers' Action Committee
16 May 2024

At Deutsche Bahn (DB) Cargo, the logistics branch of the German railway company, the threat of massive job cuts has led to a systematic increase in work pressure. This has considerable consequences for the health of railroad workers and results in life-threatening situations. A report by a railroad worker at the last meeting of the German Rail Action Committee on an incident in Mannheim once more provides a drastic demonstration of exactly this.

In rail freight transport, the plans for systemic transformation proposed by the Management Board under Sigrid Nikutta, and worked out by Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, include systematic job cuts. DB Cargo is to be trimmed for profit and all costly innovations are to be put on ice. This is because the owner of the railroad, the German government, has passed a war budget slashing the remaining budgetary provisions, the Ministry of Transport being cut by €380 million. The victims are first and foremost railroad workers.

On the night of May 3, a dangerous accident occurred at the marshalling yard in Mannheim, which has not yet appeared in any press reports, when, as rail workers have reported to the Rail Action Committee, an employee was struck.

According to the report, an engine driver was supposed to move several wagons off of a track during the night shift. He positioned his locomotive in front of the empty wagons and got out to prepare the locomotive for the operation.

He was not aware, however, that other wagons were being “pushed” onto the same track at the same time. (To assemble a train, wagons are pushed in the correct order by another locomotive over the “hump” onto the

predetermined track—i.e. “pushed off.”) However, the driver was not made aware that additional cars were rolling toward his train. They collided with the empty wagons on the track, pushing them in his direction. The wagons hit the train driver, injuring him so badly that he was taken to the hospital.

His colleagues reported him breaking several ribs and bruising his lungs—dangerous and extremely painful injuries. This accident, which could have been fatal, demonstrates yet again that working under unrelenting high pressure without sufficient precautions to protect workers' lives can indeed have life-threatening consequences.

A worker from the same marshalling yard told the Rail Action Committee: “There is a lot of pressure here at the Mannheim yard at the moment. Because the dispatchers have to meet their targets, their colleagues at the station are under a lot of pressure to work faster and faster. They try not to attract negative attention and do their best to get their work done as quickly as possible. We should really be making sure that we work safely, not just quickly.”

Above all, there is a shortage of staff on all sides. Another worker reported: “There are fewer and fewer staff. Our site manager claims that there are too many of us, but the staffing levels are already so low that six or seven of us from [the German city of] Saarbrücken have been brought to the Mannheim marshalling yard to help us out.”

The works council and the German railroad workers' union EVG are on the side of the DB Cargo Management Board, which has decreed its own “transformation” in order to trim unprofitable parts of the company and the associated jobs.

In the words of one worker, it is terrible that nobody is standing up for their colleagues, so they are speaking out: “The works council approves everything. It stands behind the site manager.” Employees are being told from all quarters “that we railroaders can’t defend ourselves against increasing work stress. Many of us already want to stop working and don’t want to come on shift.”

The worker, who is a member of the Rail Action Committee, called upon his colleagues: “It can’t go on like this. Get organized and join the Rail Action Committee. Safety affects us all; it can happen to us at any time. Don’t let yourselves be intimidated any longer. After all, we are the ones lining the bosses’ pockets and we are the ones who can stop this.”

The Rail Action Committee, which was founded during the EVG strike a year ago, has expressed its distrust of the EVG and the GDL train drivers’ union apparatus. It strives for the international unification of all railroad workers and declares that the rights and needs of employees are more important than the profit interests of investors, shareholders and speculators.

We call on all railroad workers and all those who want to take part in setting up independent Action Committees to send us reports on the conditions in their area and to contact us: Get in touch via Whatsapp on +49-163-337 8340, register using the form below or send your report to the World Socialist Web Site.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact