

Yet another fatal accident on German Rail

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Yet another fatal accident has occurred on the German railways. Early on Monday morning, October 21, a 46-year-old train driver died while working at a depot in the city of Duisburg.

The train driver involved was travelling in his railcar on the large Arcelor Mittal site in Duisburg during the night shift from Sunday to Monday. He left the driver's cab at around 3:30 a.m. to continue driving the locomotive by remote control—a procedure that is quite common in standardised work processes. For reasons as yet unexplained, he fell under the locomotive and was crushed by its weight of several tonnes.

A colleague who discovered the seriously injured man immediately administered first aid and dialled the emergency number. The ambulance crew resuscitated him on site and took him to hospital, where he died.

Rail workers, train drivers and their supporters must take this tragedy as a signal to become active and join the Rail Action Committee.

This latest appalling accident is already the eleventh in the railway sector this year to date. Such a rash of accidents is neither natural nor inevitable but is the result of the ruthless general overhaul of the railways, which is more akin to a “general destruction” and is accompanied by the wiping out of 30,000 jobs.

For workers employed by DB (Deutsche Bahn, German Rail), 2024 could be the deadliest year in a long time. Here is a brief overview, listing nine fatalities and two near-fatalities so far this year:

- January 19, near Koblenz am Rhein: A 39-year-old worker for a construction company was hit by a regional train on the tracks and fatally injured.
- March 1, Freilassing (Bavaria): A 32-year-old construction worker fell several metres through the canopy onto a platform and was crushed under falling concrete slabs; a second was seriously injured.
- March 7, Raunheim (Hesse): At a Deutsche Bahn construction site, a 21-year-old worker was hit and

dragged along by a construction train. He died shortly afterwards in Frankfurt am Main University Hospital.

- March 30, Bruchsal, southern Germany: A 42-year-old track worker was killed during welding work. While working on the side of the tracks, the worker, lying on the ground, was overlooked by an excavator driver while reversing, run over and fatally injured.

- April 14, Göttingen: A 33-year-old construction worker was hit by a heavily loaded wheel loader at the south portal of the Rauheberg tunnel (renovation of the Hanover-Würzburg high-speed line). He died at the scene of the accident.

- April 15, Lübeck: A railway employee (55), working as a guard at a temporarily closed level crossing, was hit by a locomotive and suffered serious injuries. The man was saved by emergency surgery but is marred for life.

- July 1, Bretten (Karlsruhe district): A track worker (49), a member of a construction crew, was hit and killed by a regional train.

- September 3, Wörth (Bavaria): While shunting a locomotive, a train driver was caught between a locomotive and a lorry, which collided with the train. The driver was trapped and his legs so badly injured that a helicopter had to take him to the nearest hospital.

- October 1, near Fachingen, southern Germany: During track work on the Lahntalbahn, Fachinger Tunnel (Baden-Württemberg), a 55-year-old DB employee was hit by a goods train and fatally injured.

- October 9, Lower Franconia: A track worker was struck and killed by an ICE high speed train near Kitzingen at 1:30 a.m. The railway had deployed the 52-year-old DB employee as a security guard at a construction site.

- October 21, Duisburg: A 46-year-old train driver died during night-time shunting work for Arcelor Mittal.

This list is undoubtedly incomplete because there is

no central authority that registers all accidents, let alone a body that publishes everything, warns railway workers and investigates the causes in order to prevent accidents happening again in future. “We don’t know how many people die at the workplace,” confirmed labour lawyer Wolfhard Kohte recently.

As the German television ZDF-Frontal film *Death on the Tracks* recently showed, construction teams are now often sent out without the track being properly cordoned off. For the men on the track their work becomes a kind of suicide mission, knowing that no one is there to ensure their safety or give adequate warning of approaching trains.

It is striking how many accidents occur on the track at night. A large number of workers who work for a railway subcontractor are also affected. Neither the railway management nor the two main German rail unions, the EVG and GDL, take proper responsibility for these workers.

The colleague who died recently in Duisburg also worked for an Arcelor Mittal subcontractor. The steel group, which has 900 employees in Duisburg and 190,000 worldwide, issued a cold statement through its spokesperson: “Our thoughts are with the man’s family.” Neither the EVG, nor the train drivers’ union GDL or its NRW regional group have even mentioned the accident on their websites.

It is high time that rail workers, train drivers and their supporters organise themselves into action committees independently of the unions! The Rail Action Committee, formed a year and a half ago, is an association of railway workers, with or without a union book, who are no longer prepared to tolerate the domination of the union apparatus.

The action committee is aimed at rail workers and train drivers, regardless of whether they are employed by DB, another company or a subcontractor. Our aim is to jointly fend off the massive attacks on wages, jobs and working conditions. Our allies are not the managers and union officials, many of whom sit on lucrative supervisory boards, but rail workers throughout Europe and the world.

In its founding resolution, the committee declared: “Our rights to decent wages and tolerable working conditions take precedence over the profit interests of the railway board, investors and speculators.” This demand is all the more relevant because the German

government is currently sacrificing the interests of workers in order to meet the demands of its war policy.

Regarding the growing number of accidents, we call on rail employees to document relevant information and share it with us. We will do everything we can to clarify the causes, publicise them on the WSWS and fight to put an end to such accidents.

Write to us if you have information to share with colleagues and if you’d like to take part in the work of the rail action committee! Write via WhatsApp, +49-163-337-8340 and register using the form below!



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wsws.org/contact