

Deutsche Bahn report finds fatal train crash in Garmisch-Partenkirchen “was avoidable”

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8 September 2025

The train disaster in June 2022 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which left five dead and 78 injured, “was avoidable,” according to an expert report published by national rail operator Deutsche Bahn on September 1. It confirms the assessment made at the time by the *World Socialist Web Site* in the article “A fatal accident that could have been predicted.”

On June 3, 2022, the last Friday before the Whitsun holidays, all five double-deck coaches and the locomotive of a regional train derailed at Burgrain, just beyond Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Four women and a 13-year-old boy were killed, 16 passengers seriously injured and 62 lightly wounded. As the train jumped the track, three carriages plunged down an embankment and became wedged into each other, throwing people out, crushing them between the wreckage or burying them underneath.

Law firm Gleiss Lutz, which was commissioned to carry out the confidential final report, “came to the conclusion that the accident was avoidable.” The horrific accident, the company now states, was the result of the then-responsible DB Netz subsidiary failing to act on findings of defective concrete sleepers (railroad ties). Also implicated were “the board members responsible for the division at the time.”

Deutsche Bahn has not yet published the entire final report. However, a report of over 100 pages by the Federal Railway Accident Investigation Bureau (BEU) was released in June, which sheds ample light on the dimensions and background of the disaster.

The immediate cause of the derailment were the prestressed concrete sleepers, which had been damaged at their core by chemical processes. At the accident site, these defective sleepers had been laid on a left-hand curve. Under the high forces exerted by the train in the curve, the damaged sleepers shifted, widening the track.

All the carriages derailed, and one collided with an overhead line mast, tearing open its side wall.

The track was totally destroyed over 700 metres, and three overhead line masts were torn down. The locomotive and carriages were so badly damaged that they had to be scrapped, showing the enormous forces at work. The line was closed for several months.

The poor condition of the sleepers had long been known, and there had been numerous warnings. The BEU’s report reproduces a “fault report sheet for prestressed concrete sleepers” from 2020 for precisely this stretch of track. On August 26, 2021, a special inspection again identified defective sleepers at the later accident site. On September 30, 2021, a district manager for structural engineering also walked the line and noted in his own records several concrete sleepers in the accident area that “were already particularly badly damaged and absolutely must be replaced.”

On the night before the accident, a train driver reported to the dispatcher that there was something wrong with the track at the very spot where the accident later occurred. Specifically, he referred to a “track alignment fault” or an inadequately tamped ballast bed. The protocol records the following warning:

Between Farchant and Garmisch, kilometre 97.7 to 97.6, there is a wobble in the curve, there’s a kind of kink in there, the train, ... the train actually jumps, so somehow someone needs to check if there’s maybe a track alignment fault or if it hasn’t been tamped properly.

The warning that the train was “jumping” and

“wobbled” should have triggered immediate action. Until the causes were clarified, trains should only have been allowed to pass at walking speed, if the track was not closed entirely until checked by an expert.

But the warning was not taken seriously. Despite years of damage reports, even the driver’s warning raised no alarm: it was not even passed on. At night, due to staff shortages, two section teams had been merged into one, and the dispatcher who received the report was responsible for everything on his own.

This too is clearly shown in the BEU report, even though the report does not explicitly name the true cause—the profit system and austerity drive imposed by policies of crisis and war. It refers to “a business interest of the dispatcher in maintaining operations” and states: “The objectives for an installation manager lay in setting up as few slow zones or line closures as possible.” This inevitably “led to a permanent conflict of interest and therefore to high pressure on staff.”

DB Netz, a 100 percent subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn AG responsible for the rail infrastructure, had for years been restructured for an (ultimately failed) stock market flotation. Resources were cut back and jobs slashed. At the end of 2023, DB Netz was merged into DB InfraGo, but the “permanent conflict of interest” has not been resolved.

Philipp Nagl, CEO of DB InfraGo, has announced there would be “comprehensive consequences” from the Garmisch-Partenkirchen accident. Even compensation claims against former board members are being discussed. From October, two railway workers are to face trial before the Munich Regional Court, scapegoated for the disaster. All this serves only to distract from the real causes, which lie in the murderous policy of placing profits above safety and lives.

This policy has only worsened since and continues to intensify. Increasingly, the railways, still 100 percent federally owned, are being subordinated to the war aims of the Merz-Klingbeil government. The new priorities mean that most resources are geared towards the needs of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces), while otherwise Deutsche Bahn submits to government austerity.

Recently, an interview with DB Cargo head Sigrid Nikutta explained the central role the railways already play in transporting tanks and heavy weaponry into the Ukrainian war zone. “The company is central to

Germany’s defence strategy,” said Nikutta. The flipside is the orgy of austerity, which also impacts civilian infrastructure. Transport Minister Patrick Schnieder (Christian Democrat, CDU) has announced a “ruthless” restructuring of the DB Group. At DB Cargo alone, 5,000 jobs are currently being cut.

The consequences are acute staff shortages, chronic delays and cancellations, as well as ever greater risks to workers and passengers. Severe rail accidents continue to occur, most recently in late July with the rail disaster near Riedlingen (Baden-Württemberg), which killed three and injured 36. The problem is spreading across Europe and internationally, as shown by the train disaster in Tempi, Greece, in March 2023 with 57 dead, or just a few days ago with the funicular rail crash in Lisbon.

Fatal workplace accidents in the railway sector also continue, though they rarely make the news. In May 2025 alone, there were four fatal accidents in just four weeks. No German authority, not even the BEU, systematically records all railway accidents.

Two years ago, in response to the cuts in real wages negotiated by the EVG and GDL unions, the independent rank-and-file Rail Action Committee was formed. It launched its own investigation after a severe workplace accident at Deutsche Bahn. Since then, the Action Committee has uncovered that in the last year alone there were at least 11 serious or fatal workplace accidents at Deutsche Bahn. The year before, there were at least 12 such accidents.

The Rail Action Committee calls for all information concerning safety to be collected independently, so that it can be made available to the entire working class. Please write to us if you have information of your own and can participate in building the Rail Action Committee! Write via WhatsApp at +49-163-337-8340 and register using the form below!



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