

German train drivers' union agrees to real wage cuts and stabs local transport workers in the back

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The collective agreement negotiated by the German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) with the German rail company Deutsche Bahn (DB AG) on February 26 amounts to a real wage cut that stabs local transport workers, who are also engaged in collective bargaining negotiations, in the back. With this agreement, the GDL is providing the German government, which owns Deutsche Bahn, an indispensable service against the working class.

First, the agreement includes a real wage cut. The new contract, which begins with a six-month wage freeze and a 5 percent wage increase in two steps starting in August 2026, will not compensate for the real wage losses during this period. Two linear wage increases of 2.5 percent each are planned, the first on August 1, 2026 and the second on August 1, 2027.

The new agreement also includes a one-time payment of €700 for employees and €350 for trainees and student trainees (as well as for employees who have been with the company for 35 years, the new pay grade 8). However, the one-time payments are only intended to ease the pressure in the short term. They are not included in the pay scale and therefore do not represent a permanent improvement in purchasing power.

The Informationsdienst Wissenschaft (idw) recently calculated the real wage cuts based on the wage agreement negotiated with Verdi, the German services union. Verdi had accepted a 5.8 percent wage increase for state employees over 27 months. As stated in the idw declaration, “due to the significant increase in social security contributions and the progressive effect of income tax in 2026, **the real net wage is likely to be lower than in the previous year**” (Emphasis added). Professor Oliver Holtemöller from the Leibniz Institute

for Economic Research in the city of Halle explained: “Although the agreed wage increases raise the wage table, employees will still have to make do with less disposable income in real terms.”

This is precisely what has come to pass with the new wage agreement for train drivers and conductors. Although the GDL claims in its latest circular that the agreement includes “structural adjustments to the pay scales” and “improved pay grades,” these are not specified.

What is particularly striking is that the GDL is concluding negotiations and agreeing to a two-year strike ban at a time when anger and militancy among colleagues are growing.

Deutsche Bahn is in the process of launching a massive attack on jobs and working conditions. Just last week, the Deutsche Bahn executive board announced that “thousands of jobs” would be cut at DB Cargo. According to internal sources, only 8,000 of the 14,000 jobs in the freight division will remain by 2030. This will inevitably affect many train drivers and massively increase the work pressure for the rest.

In addition, the latest sell-off comes at a time when the German Merz-Klingbeil government is planning far-reaching social attacks to finance its war policy. It is attacking the eight-hour working day, continued pay in the event of illness, protection against dismissal and pensions. Last year, Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared: “We can no longer afford the welfare state.”

In this situation, the GDL's agreement has deprived train drivers and conductors of the opportunity to effectively fight for better conditions and against the government's war policy in a joint struggle with tram, bus, light rail drivers, pilots, flight attendants and other

sections of the working class.

Local public transport has held its third warning strike of its current wage dispute, and the GDL is stabbing these workers in the back with its agreement, making it easier for the Verdi service union to sell out all these struggles and push through real wage cuts so that the federal government's insane war policy can be financed.

When news of the GDL agreement reached the Verdi warning strikes on Friday, discontent spread among the strikers. "We could have struck together to achieve more," said a striking tram driver in front of the Munich tram depot. "Sixteen years ago, it was the other way around; back then, the GDL went on strike and Verdi didn't." Others said that Verdi could not be trusted either and that nothing would come of it in the end. "But it's not true that there's no money," said one striker. "The money is just going to the war in Ukraine."

The GDL agreement confirms what the *World Socialist Web Site* has been writing for years: The GDL, which initially presented itself as more militant than the other German Trade Union Confederation unions representing rail workers, EVG and Verdi, has proven to be just as compliant a prop of management and the government against workers. It has repeatedly called off strikes prematurely out of deference to the federal government and German business. The GDL has even set up its own temporary employment agency for train drivers, Fair Train, and elected the ultra-right-wing Rainer Wendt as its supervisory board chairman.

After the last wage agreement, the WSWS wrote:

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.

This has been clearly confirmed by the latest collective agreement with its real wage cuts. It effectively separates train drivers and conductors from other employees and is proving to be a strike breaker. With its gag clause stipulating a two-year ban on strikes, the GDL is tying the hands of train drivers and conductors in an explosive political situation.

The attacks on wages, working hours and public services are international, as are the increasingly threatening preparations for war. Train drivers, train attendants and all workers must counter the nationalist policies of the GDL, EVG and Verdi with international cooperation among the working class. The working class can only defend itself by building independent rank-and-file committees and uniting with their colleagues in local and long-distance transport, workshops, on-board staff, public transport depots and other public services.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) networks these committees worldwide, jointly prepares new and effective measures of struggle and clarifies the political issues involved. Sign up using the form below to participate in building further independent rank-and-file committees!



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