

Germany: Left Party attacks striking train drivers

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The Left Party has joined the all-party and media offensive against striking train drivers in Germany. On Thursday, Left Party chairman Bernd Riexinger spoke out against the strike. He told the *Rheinische Post*, “The wage demands of the drivers are correct, the strike is wrong because it splits the workforce.”

Tom Strohschneider, editor of the party’s newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, also attacked the train drivers. In a comment he began by criticizing the outburst of hostility to the GDL (Union of German Train Drivers) and its chairman Claus Weselsky, only then to add his voice to the chorus of critics of the strike: “It’s true: The GDL is not an endangered political species. It is quite possible to criticize its strategy and chairman. After all, it’s about things that not only concern train drivers.”

The statements by the party chairman and its daily newspaper make clear where the Left Party stands in the escalating conflict—not on the side of the workers, but rather in solidarity with the German government.

In declaring that the strike is wrong because it splits the workforce, the Left Party is regurgitating the principal argument of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB), the German government and the media, which have been attacking the striking drivers for weeks. The accusation of dividing the workforce means supporting the principle of enforcing all workers to accept a single contract, which the government is currently attempting to legalize.

This single contract principle is aimed directly against the interests of workers. It concentrates power in the hands of the DGB and its affiliated unions, which work hand in hand with company management and the government. For years the DGB has been the main agency in the hands of the bosses to prevent strikes and effectively sabotage any labor dispute. The demand for

single contracts and a corresponding law would award the DGB dictatorial powers in every factory and workplace.

This trend is already well advanced on the railways. The Railway and Transport union (EVG), which emerged from a fusion of the unions Transnet and GdED, has collaborated with the Deutsche Bahn (German Rail, DB) management to impose massive attacks on railway workers. The total workforce has been slashed from 350,000 in 2002 to 190,000 in 2012. The result has been a huge increase in overtime and intolerable working conditions. Last year rail staff worked almost 8 million hours overtime.

The fact that the GDL, which quit the official DB contract straitjacket in 2002, now dares to organize a strike that has more than just symbolic impact has unleashed a wave of hostility against train drivers from the DB executive, the EVG, the government and now the Left Party. The aim of a new law enforcing the principle of a single contract for all workers is to create the conditions where any sort of similar strike, outside of the control of the DGB, can be declared illegal.

In other words, the Left Party opposes the basic right of workers to defend themselves against wage and job cuts and increasing workloads.

The open hostility of the Left Party to the striking train drivers comes as no surprise. The party’s leadership has close links to the bureaucratic apparatus of the DGB. Left Party leader Riexinger was a functionary of the DGB-affiliated Verdi trade union for decades. After its recent backing for the German government’s war policy it is now supporting its attacks on the right to strike.



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