

Circumstances of fatal accident of Deutsche Bahn rail worker in Cologne must be clarified

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On 14 September Ali Ceyhan died. He was only 33 years old. Three days earlier, he had been hit by a train while working on the tracks at Cologne Trimborner Straße station. He was resuscitated at the scene of the accident, but eventually succumbed to his severe head injuries.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently learned this from his partner Katharina Lopes Duarte, who is also 33 years old. She does not accept how national rail operator Deutsche Bahn, for which Ali Ceyhan worked, is dealing with this accident. She is demanding justice and the exact circumstances of his tragic death. Ali's family supports her in this effort to the best of their ability.

Speaking to the WSWS, Susen, Ali's sister, described the dark time that all her relatives are currently going through: "I have lost my brother, my parents have lost their son, Katharina her partner. We have lost our sense of life, are in darkness. We are looking for answers and getting none. We want something to really change now, to increase safety on the railways."

"I am doing everything I can so that no one else will be in the same situation as us, losing a loved one," Katharina emphasised. Ali was a mechanic maintaining the points and would have taken his exam to be a master mechanic in November. The two had been together for ten years, they were planning a family. "My heart is broken," she said. "I have lost the love of my life."

Katharina has energetically taken up an investigation into the unfortunate death of her partner. She has contacted the press, media, Deutsche Bahn, the works council and the EVG trade union. "Ali should not disappear as a number in the statistics," she says.

"But the real point of my initiative," Katharina

continued, "in public is that Deutsche Bahn cannot continue to point the finger at the little people and explain away every accidental death as human error." Her goal, is for Deutsche Bahn to take technical safety precautions to prevent such fatal accidents in the future.

"Ali had earned 1,700 euros net," she says. "I don't think he was aware of how dangerous the job was." What exactly happened on the day of the accident, 11 September, she does not know.

But when an employee of the organ donation association—Ali was an organ donor—then told her that this year "he was collecting organs from railway workers in the North Rhine-Westphalia area for the third time," her ears perked up and she began to do some research.

She discovered the WSWS article, which reported on nine fatal accidents that occurred on the railways up to 10 September 2023. It also briefly noted Ali Ceyhan's accident on 11 September. At that time, Deutsche Bahn had only published two lines about the accident, referred to in the article, but had not reported that it resulted in death. Ali, is thus, the tenth person to die on the railways this year!

Questioning the workplace safety standards at Deutsche Bahn, Katharina immediately put into motion all the levers at her disposal. She approached Deutsche Bahn, the railway and transport union (EVG), the works council and numerous media outlets to raise the issue of the lack of security, which was apparently a widespread phenomenon.

"My friend overheard a conversation between Deutsche Bahn staff on the train," she reports, "after which a repair team had no supervising staff to protect the team on the track. The senior staff member then refused to repair the train for safety reasons. Deutsche Bahn reportedly reacted by issuing warnings against

colleagues.” She said her friend then spoke to the group and informed them about Ali Ceyhan’s work accident.

While she has received support from railway employees, the reactions from Deutsche Bahn, EVG and the works council have been disappointing and outrageous.

Deutsche Bahn sent her a standardised death notice, in the name of the company and the works council, which can only be described as distasteful, given the circumstances of her partner’s death. It contained a short, superficial sentence of condolence, stating that Ali Ceyhan had “died suddenly and unexpectedly.”

Outraged, Katharina wrote a letter in reply, explicitly opposing the publication of such an obituary.

“I am outraged and shocked by the mendacious sympathy of the works council,” she wrote. “Every accident is ‘sudden and unexpected’. You’ve got to be kidding me. HE DIED WORKING FOR THE GERMAN RAILWAY, and you can’t deny that!” It is “more than obvious that you are only representing the interests of the company.” This, she said, was outrageous. “I will not allow you to play down this tragedy,” she concluded.

She said Deutsche Bahn has apologised and since proposed a different text that was more personal but also did not address rail safety.

But safety is precisely what she, and the family are concerned about. Katharina made this clear in her letter to the EVG, of which Ali Ceyhan was a member. In it, she addressed the inadequate security precautions and the responsibility of Deutsche Bahn and EVG. “Has Deutsche Bahn exhausted all technically available possibilities, considering that cars can already brake by themselves?” she asked.

Referring to the dangerous nature of the profession (“locomotive drivers and related professions” rank third among the most dangerous professions in Germany), she asked about the adequacy of the pay. Ali earned about 2,700 euros gross—about 1,700 euros net—a month. “Is such a salary in relation to the danger Deutsche Bahn employees are exposed to every day? Where is the outcry from your union? For months, the collective bargaining dispute with Deutsche Bahn was reported. Why was the safety of the employees never addressed in this dispute?”

“Ali’s death could have been avoided,” she wrote, expressing the hope that “this letter will ensure that this

issue is discussed publicly, and that Ali’s death will thus serve a purpose, namely that his approximately 211,000 colleagues in Germany can go to work every day knowing that they will also return home safely to their families.”

She concluded by saying that Ali was a member of the EVG and asks, “Their motto is: ‘The railway and transport union is the strong professional interest group that collectively and reliably ensures [...] good and safe working conditions for the entire workforce.’ Is that really the case? I want to know specifically what exactly the union will do for its member Ali Ceyhan to hold Deutsche Bahn to account and to protect more members from death.”

In his terse reply, Cologne-based EVG secretary Wilfried Otten wrote that the EVG was “always concerned that employers put safety first,” but then evaded the specific questions and hid behind the “ongoing investigations by the public prosecutor’s office.” Therefore, the EVG “cannot comment on possible questions of guilt on the part of the employer.”



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