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Germany

# Strikes in the transport sector in Germany

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV590 - March 2024 -

Publication date: Tuesday 5 March 2024

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**Because of the extreme integration of the German trade union leadership into the capitalist system, wage disputes are never really tough. The bureaucracy takes a social partnership line. This is why, especially since the pandemic and even more so since the rise in inflation, there have been significant real wage losses (in 2023, they were on average 4 to 6%).**

In recent months, however, there has been a noticeable change, and this is because the labour market situation is favourable to employees. In many sectors, there is a shortage of skilled labour. This makes workers more self-confident and more willing to fight. So for months now, under pressure from the rank and file, working conditions have become an increasingly important issue. They are demanding more bonuses for shift work, paid breaks and above all shorter working hours, but of course also higher wages, as was the case during the strikes by airport employees (security staff and ground staff of the Lufthansa Group).

## Public transport

The most important struggle in this context is currently taking place in urban transport. During the week of 26 February to 2 March, workers paralysed urban transport in more than 70 major cities for one or two days. The special feature of this action is that four years ago, the Fridays for Future (FfF) organisation joined forces with the ver.di services union to form the *Wir fahren zusammen* (We go together) alliance. This time, highly effective joint demonstrations took place on the main strike day, 1 March. This is the first time in Germany that a trade union and part of the climate protection movement have acted together. This was possible above all because the alliance emphasized: "For social and climate protection reasons, we need a turning point in transport, i.e. a massive expansion of public transport. To achieve this, we need more drivers. There is already a shortage of bus drivers, because too few people want to do this arduous job (the work is hard and the pay is too low). We need to make the job more attractive, and that means reducing working hours with full pay compensation."

Unlike what usually happens, this time the press did not attack the strikers, for two main reasons: the public sees the high workload of public transport employees and also sees the need to develop public transport.

Admittedly, this has not yet led to a satisfactory agreement (the union bureaucracy is unlikely to take advantage of the momentum now gained to push through the majority of demands). But the employees, buoyed by the success of the mobilisation and their new-found self-confidence, will not be calming down any time soon.

## Train drivers in struggle

Collective bargaining for train drivers has been going on for 4 months in a similar context of staff shortages. But there is one key difference: the train drivers' union (GDL) is not part of the major DGB trade union confederation and, because of its much more combative stance, it is under fire from both the government and the rival EVG union (a member of the DGB). The GDL received no support from the DGB; on the contrary, the major industrial unions demanded that the GDL give in.

During negotiations, which recently took place behind closed doors over a period of 4 weeks, the railway company

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failed to meet its main demand, namely a reduction in working time from 38 to 35 hours. It is therefore expected that in a few days' time there will be further strikes on the railways, bringing rail traffic to a standstill for several days.

4 March 2024

PS:

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