

German train drivers stage longest-ever strike, plunging economy into chaos

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Berlin, January 26 (RHC)-- Germany's train drivers have staged their longest-ever industrial action over pay and working hours, plunging the nation's market into chaos. German train drivers began on

Wednesday their fourth strike since November, sparking warnings of huge costs to the state and nation at a time when the German economy was already ailing.

The strike prompted passengers to scramble to rebook or cancel their plans while economists were sounding the alarm, warning that the latest industrial action could cost the economy up to a billion euros (\$1.1 billion).

Economic experts said the rail strike, set to last for almost a week, will leave a deep impact on the nation's economy. The workers' ongoing labor dispute over pay and conditions with the employers signals an escalation of the dispute between the German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) and rail operator Deutsche Bahn (DB).

The last face-to-face negotiations between the GDL and DB took place at the end of November 2023. On Monday, the GDL had called for a six-day strike from 2:00 a.m. local time (0100 GMT) Wednesday until 6 p.m. on Monday for passenger traffic. The strike for freight trains began a day earlier.

The GDL is seeking higher salaries to compensate for inflation, as well as a reduced working week from 38 to 35 hours without a salary reduction, arguing that it needed to make train driver jobs "more attractive" to young people.

However, Deutsche Bahn blasted the latest round of industrial action, saying it had offered pay rises of up to 13 percent and a one-off inflation bonus, as well as the chance to reduce the working week by one hour from 2026. Ahead of the strike, the workers' union had rejected the offering.

In the meantime, economists see eye to eye on the German train drivers' industrial action's detrimental effects, warning that the strike could cost the nation's economy dearly. German Industries Federation Managing Director, Tanja Gonner, concurred that "With a six-day strike, it is not unrealistic to expect losses totaling up to ?1 billion."

"This is a strike against the German economy," DB spokeswoman Anja Broeker protested, noting that "cargo traffic handled by the service include supplies for power plants, refineries."

However, she also gave assurance that "DB Cargo will do everything to secure the supply chain, but it's clear that there will be some impact."

DB estimates each strike could cost the company "a low two-digit million figure." However, economic experts expect a deeper impact and more severe losses to the nation's economy.

German Transport Minister Volker Wissing described the strike as "destructive," warning it would mount further pressure on supply chains that are already under strain due to the shipping disruptions in the Red Sea. "I find that it is unreasonable vis-a-vis train travelers that the trains are standing there blocked while one's not at the same time sitting at the negotiating table," Wissing said.

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