

# WISAG workers continue hunger strike at Frankfurt Airport

Marianne Arens  
1 March 2021

The WISAG workers continued their hunger strike at the Rhein-Main Airport in Frankfurt on Monday. They are fighting against arbitrary dismissals and massive wage theft. WISAG is using the pandemic as an opportunity to replace experienced staff with cheaper, temporary workers with no rights and to introduce a regime of “hire and fire.”

Local and national media outlets continued their blackout over the weekend, failing to cover the hunger strike at all. At the same time, WSWs articles are spreading rapidly on social media. A Berlin bus driver said he canceled his subscription to a newspaper because it did not even mention the hunger strike.

On Facebook, WISAG workers from other locations are expressing their solidarity with the Frankfurt workers. The reports are attracting particular interest in Berlin, where around 300 WISAG workers were also dismissed during the summer in the move from Schönefeld to Tegel Airport.

At the Frankfurt Airport, the hunger strike has been a point of attraction for six days by many workers, who visit and express their support for the strikers. Many of them face similar problems and report job cuts and loss of wages. For example, Lufthansa has just sold its catering subsidiary LSG. The airport operator Fraport is also in the process of cutting thousands of jobs and outsourcing parts of its operations. News has just come from Munich of the insolvency of Swissport Losch, threatening the jobs of 900 ground workers.

On Saturday, some of the dismissed WISAG staff demonstrated in front of the Frankfurt villa of company owner Claus Wisser, who is from one of the 300 richest families in Germany.

In an internal letter, WISAG Managing Director Michael Dietrich breathed fire and brimstone against the hunger strikers. He told the “dear employees” that

the hunger strike was “excessive and irresponsible.” It was “aimed at stopping a company from acting in a fundamentally lawful way,” he said. Dietrich openly admitted to the dismissals and miserable severance pay but claimed compulsory redundancies were necessary “to prepare us for the time after the crisis.”

Dietmar Gaisenkersting, a candidate for the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SEP in Germany) in the federal election, held an online discussion with two of the WISAG workers on Sunday. Habip and Özkan, like practically all the hunger strikers, are experienced airport workers who work on the ramp and handle planes on the apron.

Just before Christmas, the company told workers, who had built up the company and had over 20 years of work experience, that their jobs would be terminated at the end of March. WISAG had initially agreed to a modest social plan with the works council, but the workers rejected it. “We just want to keep working,” Habip, a loadmaster at the ramp, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. Since then, the works council has withdrawn.

“We have now organised a total of seven demonstrations, but not once has the works council been there,” Habip reports, not to mention the union Verdi.

“They have let us down,” Özkan said. “When we started the struggle here, we were all just workers. No one from the works council was there. We started this action to protect ourselves and everyone else, and we will continue to do so.”

The motto of the hunger strike is “Today it’s us, tomorrow it’s you.” The workers had tried to talk to management about the lousy layoff plans, but the company responded each time with even more brutal attacks. Özkan reports, “The answer was, ‘No, we

don't see that happening, we pick the people [we lay off] ourselves, and there's no more in severance pay." When the workers received their notice just before Christmas, the severance pay that came was supposed to be a paltry €3,000-4,000.

When the workers filed complaints with the labour tribunal, WISAG threatened to shut down the whole operation. "When we filed a lawsuit against the dismissals, management threatened to close the company and sign completely new contracts with new people" under a separate business Rhein-Main GmbH, which WISAG Managing Director Michael Dietrich had only founded in 2020.

Things went the same way in Berlin, too, he said. "They halt operations, open a new company and start from scratch." He added, "They are trying to scare people with this example."

The two described the company's oppressive methods. Among those laid off are 31 airport bus drivers, who have not received a wage since October 2020. "These workers are to be shunted off into a subcontracting company that has no future anyway," Habip said. They are expected to "throw away everything they have worked for after over 20 years." Because they refused, they were "banned from the airport as punishment. Since then, they have not received any wages. But because they have not been correctly dismissed, they also do not receive any unemployment benefits from the Job Centre."

The coronavirus pandemic has intensified the conflict between the company and the workers. Absurdly, WISAG Manager Dietrich accuses the hunger strikers of "endangering people's health during the pandemic." On the contrary, the workers are risking their health for the company every day by continuing to toil virtually unprotected during the pandemic, even though WISAG has officially applied for short-time work funding. As a result of the short-time working scheme, which is paid for by the labour office and thus the taxes of working people, the company has incurred "no expenses at all in wages," Özkan explained.

The company's profits from this is apparently not enough, so it is now using the pandemic to get rid of the most experienced staff and replace them with temporary workers. Özkan said, "They are taking advantage of the opportunity to make compulsory redundancies. Later, when things start up again, they'll

hire people on lower wages and benefits."

Workers at the demonstration in Frankfurt were also determined to continue the struggle and not just in their own interests. Ibo, another WISAG worker, told the WSWS, "New fake companies are being set up all the time, and workers are losing their rights. The works council has collaborated with [managing director] Dietrich and sold us out. If we give up now, this will become a model. Then capitalists all over Germany will do like Wisser."

We call on our readers to send messages of solidarity to the hunger strikers and copy the WSWS so that we can publish them and pass them on to the workers. Form action committees in your own workplaces to conduct a joint struggle, independent of the trade unions and establishment parties, and unite internationally to prepare for a European-wide general strike.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**