

# WISAG imposes new sackings at Frankfurt Airport

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For three months, a group of ground workers at Frankfurt Airport has been fighting against their dismissal by service provider WISAG. With eight demonstrations and rallies so far and an eight-day hunger strike, these workers turned to their colleagues under the slogan, “Today it’s us—tomorrow you!” and made their struggle known to the public.

The response of the WISAG group, which handles planes at Frankfurt’s Rhein-Main Airport, is even more brutal sackings. At the beginning of March, over 30 more long-serving employees, including some who are severely disabled, were given notice to quit at the end of June 2021. This became known on March 11, when workers gathered for another demonstration in front of the WISAG group headquarters in Frankfurt.

It was also clear at this rally that the industrial action is spreading further afield and gaining the support of more workers facing the same problems. “The guys at the airport are pissed off that we have been dismissed,” Serkan told the gathered workers. Despite the supposedly coronavirus-related dismissals, he said it was very busy on the apron and in the cargo halls, and the remaining WISAG colleagues are having to work under great stress.

Colleagues were being forced to cope with the extremely hard work with far too small teams, half of which were made up of inexperienced temporary workers. “Meanwhile, the management that signed off on our redundancies is sitting safe from coronavirus working from home.”

At the important Rhine-Main Airport hub, few passenger planes are currently landing and taking off due to the virus, but the cargo area is working at full capacity as the transport of food, aid, medicine, etc. continues. According to the Frankfurt customs authorities, 6 billion masks were handled here last year.

The supply chains for industry also continue here, which never completely shut down during the entire pandemic.

WISAG had to unload five to six large planes there a day, one worker reported. “Why were we dismissed?” Serkan asks the group. “For a few months now, more and more temporary workers have been employed there.” He adds that it is also hard for them, as the job requires experienced workers.

Loads were now often transported as a “cabin-load,” Riza K., another dismissed WISAG worker, told the WSW. “Cabin-load” means that the cabin of a passenger plane is filled to the brim with cardboard boxes instead of passengers. The workers must lift the boxes in one by one, stow them on the seats and lash them down. Normal conveyor belts do not reach the height of the passenger cabin. If none of the rare special belts is available, workers carry the cargo up the stairs. “Cabin-load is absolute madness,” Riza said. “At least three people are needed per conveyor belt, and in some cases, they drag the boxes up or down on foot.”

Riza also confirmed that there were clear signs of growing solidarity. Their struggle against dismissals was increasingly popular among airport staff, he said. “More dismissals are coming out every day and colleagues are feeling the same as us.” Other ground workers had heard about the protest and sympathised with it. “WISAG sometimes has no pushback drivers,” and then other teams refused to step in.

WISAG was clearly short of staff, he said. For example, an Etihad aircraft did not get off the ground for 80 minutes, and WISAG asked airport operator Fraport for help. Although Fraport management had already agreed, the on-site operations manager refused, with the argument, “No, I’m sorry,” first WISAG had to reinstate its own drivers.

WISAG is not the only company to use the coronavirus pandemic as a pretext for arbitrarily dismissing long-serving workers, outsourcing entire departments and lowering wage levels. Lufthansa, Fraport, Airbus and many other corporations have also already announced the elimination of hundreds of thousands of jobs, and the main trade unions are actively involved in drawing up the layoff plans. At the airport, the service trade union Verdi has not lifted a finger for those dismissed.

This was shown again by WISAG's latest dismissals. Among those sacked are several workers who should be specially protected because of their severe disability. They were thrown out "for operational reasons" and "in the course of so-called mass dismissals."

Mehmet has toiled at the airport for 40 years, ruining his health. He has a 50 percent severe disability. But with one stroke of the pen, all the seeming safeguards—representation for the severely disabled, works council, integration office, etc.—no longer apply.

In his letter of dismissal, it says, "The works council was duly consulted and objected to the dismissal. ... Also, we consulted the representative body for severely disabled persons, which did not make any statement. Finally, we have obtained the necessary consent of the Integration Office to your dismissal."

And cynically it continues, "For the sake of good order, we would like to point out to you that you are obliged to register personally with the employment agency as a jobseeker at least three months before termination of the employment relationship. Also, we point out that you must develop your own activities in the search for other employment."

Mehmet said, "I have worked at the airport all my life, ruined my health here. In the beginning, it was a dream job here, you thought you had found the job for life. Today, I have grandchildren of my own, and my wife is also disabled. And from one day to the next, WISAG kicks me out."

He had experienced how people had also come to work sick. WISAG was known for its constant skimping and manipulation with timesheets to squeeze the maximum out of workers. For him, industrial action was now vital. "I think we all have to stick together as human beings!"

Speaking at the rally, Marianne Arens, a candidate for the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality

Party, SGP) in this year's federal election, stressed the importance of industrial action. "Your collective action is a turning point," she said. "Your slogan, 'Today it's us—tomorrow you,' also means that tomorrow, hundreds of thousands more workers will follow your example."

A message of greeting was also read out in Turkish. In it, the British and Turkish Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees pledged to make the WISAG workers' struggle known internationally. Their message ends with the words, "The events at WISAG confirm the need for workers to build rank-and-file committees independent of the unions to defend their interests."



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