

What next in the airport workers struggle against the WISAG Group in Germany?

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With the March 16 rally in front of the Hesse state assembly in Wiesbaden, the struggle of the airport ground workers against the WISAG Group has reached a crossroads.

For three months now, the workers have been fighting against arbitrary dismissals and wage theft. The WISAG Group is using the pandemic as an excuse to kick out workers with decades of experience, replace them with cheap labour and drive down wage levels for everyone. Airport bus drivers, who had resisted their transfer to a dummy company, have not been paid since October 2020.

In the struggle against this, the ground staff proved that workers cannot be led like lambs to the slaughter. Workers have rights, and those who believe—like the Wisser family who owns the company—that they can turn them into slaves without rights are mistaken. The workers are determined not to give up, because the right to work is a fundamental right, as is the right to reasonable pay and safe working conditions.

The WISAG workers have held at least 10 rallies and demonstrations and even went on hunger strike at Terminal 1 at the Frankfurt Airport, keeping this up for eight days. Most recently, they marched in front of the Wiesbaden state assembly last Tuesday. The workers resigned from the service union Verdi, which did not even notice the dismissals and has not lifted a finger for them. They joined the small sectoral union IGL instead.

In Wiesbaden, however, it became clear that the IGL does not advance a different perspective than Verdi. The IGL allowed the representatives of the same political parties responsible for the terrible conditions at the airport to dominate the discussion. The microphone passed from one politician to another, and the Christian Democrats (CDU), Social Democrats (SPD), Free Democrats (FDP) and Left Party only gave the workers

a symbolic and real pat on the back, expressed their respective party's "solidarity" with them and shed hypocritical crocodile tears.

The workers had collected 1,000 signatures and held thousands of discussions with acquaintances, colleagues and passers by at the airport during the hunger strike. CDU member of parliament, Ismail Tipi, took these signatures and handed them over to the president of the Hesse state assembly, his CDU party colleague Boris Rhein, in the state parliament building. In which drawer—or which wastepaper basket—they subsequently disappeared is not known. In any case, the parliamentary plenary discussion was not interrupted for a minute by the process.

In Wiesbaden, the IGL showed it was placing the fate of the airport ground workers in the hands of politicians from the CDU, FDP, the Greens, the SPD and the Left Party. The same parties that are responsible for the social misery, the mass dismissals and the political shift to the right; the same parties that sacrificed the lives of tens of thousands of workers for the profit interests of the rich with their policy of opening up the economy in the coronavirus pandemic.

The Wisser family, one of the 300 richest business families in Germany, is closely linked to all these parties. For decades, the WISAG Group has organised both facilities management and security at the Frankfurt Trade Fair, the airport, bank towers and public spaces. Claus Wisser donates generously, not only to his own party, the SPD. He also contributes his millions to numerous real estate projects.

This also explains why the media, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Hessenschau*, etc., was able to isolate the industrial action against the WISAG Group in such a way, only reporting on the hunger strike when it was already over.

Again and again, the WISAG workers have declared, “We will never give up.” But determination alone is not enough. The workers are at a crossroads, and they must decide. Where the road leads advocated by the IGL can be clearly seen. The IGL is appealing to the bourgeois politicians and the main trade unions. Next, a rally is planned in front of the Verdi headquarters in Frankfurt, that is, of all places, in front of the union from which the workers have resigned.

This way is leading the workers by the nose and in circles. The slogan “Together we are strong” will become an empty phrase and in the end it will be “Everyone dies alone.”

Instead, the workers must turn to the only allies they have—their colleagues at all WISAG branches in Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg, etc., to the workers at other airports, as well as to the production workers and the auto workers who are currently engaged in protest strikes. Workers everywhere are facing the same problems. Their rights are being attacked most fiercely.

WISAG is not an isolated case, rather, the brutal actions of the WISAG Group are the new business model. The airport operator Fraport, Lufthansa, Airbus and the big production companies are also planning mass redundancies. Even at automaker Opelwerke, which has its main plant a few kilometres from the airport in Rüsselsheim, jobs are being destroyed, company pensions cut, temporary workers hired and fired.

The corporations and banks worldwide are profiting from the pandemic to push through long cherished restructuring plans at the expense and on the backs of workers. All governments are ruthlessly enforcing the herd immunity policies that have already claimed 2.7 million victims. According to a World Bank estimate, some 120 million people have lost their livelihoods in the pandemic so far, while hundreds of billions have been thrown aside by the banks and corporations.

The postwar “social market economy” is bankrupt. Germany’s much vaunted co-determination model of “worker representation” has transformed the trade union bureaucrats and works councils into supervisory board overlings and junior partners of the corporations. Workers’ social and democratic rights are no longer compatible with the capitalist economy’s drive for profits. When workers defend their rights today, as at WISAG, they are confronting a phalanx of companies,

political parties and trade unions.

Workers who really want to achieve something and not just symbolic protests must therefore organise themselves independently of the unions, into action committees. They must break with the bankrupt begging of the IGL and link up with committees of fellow workers in other workplaces and develop and extend the industrial action together.

The action committees must protect and defend all those who are exposed to the arbitrary attacks of the oligarchs. They must contact airports all over Europe to prepare a European-wide general strike. This is the only way to defend jobs and wages. Already, according to WSWs reports, numerous workers’ initiatives have shown solidarity with the striking WISAG workers.

Any serious struggle inevitably brings workers into conflict with the capitalist system and its parties. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) therefore arms workers with a socialist programme aimed at the revolutionary transformation of society according to the interests of working people. No social problem can be solved without expropriating the big corporations and placing them under the democratic control of the working class. This is the perspective for which the SGP is fighting in the federal elections.



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