

May Day in Frankfurt, Germany: WISAG worker warns of tens of thousands of job cuts

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This year, the DGB (German Trade Union Confederation) held its ritual May Day rally under the meaningless motto “Solidarity is the Future.” On the fringes of the official rally in front of Frankfurt’s Alte Oper, a group of workers spoke out. Speaking on behalf of the dismissed WISAG workers, Ertugrul Kurnaz said: “That sounds good, but it can only be true if solidarity is not just something for the future, and if you stop just talking about it.”

Kurnaz started by reporting about the struggle at the Rhine-Main airport against mass dismissals. Rally participants and passers-by stopped and listened with interest. Kurnaz said he could sum up what the WISAG company was doing to the workers at the airport “in four simple words: they were used, exploited, tricked and thrown out.” The only unusual thing, he said, was that they did not just quietly accept it. “We did not bow down. We started fighting for our jobs. Since mid-December last year, we have continued our resistance.”

What had happened to the 260 WISAG workers so far was “not exceptional,” he continued. “It’s happening to tens of thousands of workers all over this country. ... Haven’t you heard that big companies like Lufthansa, Mercedes and others are preparing to destroy tens of thousands of jobs nationwide?” It was not without reason that the WISAG workers had chosen the motto: “Today it’s us—tomorrow you.” They were convinced that their resistance would serve as an example for many thousands of other workers who were facing the same situation, Kurnaz said.

The WISAG workers had tried to send a speaker to the official union podium, but the Frankfurt DGB and the service sector union Verdi did not allow it. Instead, they had invited Frankfurt Mayor Peter Feldmann (Social Democratic Party, SPD) to speak. Feldmann is best friends with Claus Wisser, Sr., the oligarch, founder and owner of WISAG, and had presented him with the city’s

plaque of honour a few years ago. Numerous Frankfurt projects are financially dependent on the billionaire Wisser family, which partly explains the silence with which the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, for example, has so far met the WISAG workers’ struggle.

Another reason for the silence about this industrial action is its explosiveness for the other airport companies. If the struggle became known among broader layers of workers, many of whom also face redundancies, it could trigger a conflagration. Lufthansa, airport operator Fraport and their subsidiaries and suppliers plan to destroy several tens of thousands of jobs with the help of Verdi and the other aviation unions. WISAG itself has already announced 87 more redundancies recently at ASG, a subsidiary responsible for cabin cleaning.

Kurnaz explained on Saturday: “It is a fact that the pandemic has long since brought catastrophic consequences, especially for workers. A new catastrophe is already in the making.” Soon, he said, there would be mass [job] destruction at the contracting companies, and they were also tricking blue- and white-collar workers to exploit them even more. Therefore, workers must stick together, he said to applause. “Neither the pandemic nor any other reason must be accepted to destroy thousands and thousands of jobs.”

Another WISAG worker, Habip B., who had been employed as a loadmaster on the tarmac and had also been dismissed by the company after more than 20 years’ service, put it even more bluntly. Speaking in a video for the WSWS, Habip supported the call of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for the May Day Online Rally and the building of an International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

In it, he reported that workers had formed an independent committee at the airport to fight the dismissals. “We have already held 13 demos and an eight-

day hunger strike.” He said that the service workers’ union Verdi had completely abandoned them. That is why they, the WISAG workers, had had to organise everything themselves. He supported the call for the IWA-RFC, “so that we workers can fight strongly together as a working class, independent of any trade unions.”

On the evening of May Day, an alternative May First demonstration in Frankfurt was brutally attacked by the police. Over 3,000 mostly young participants had marched peacefully from the Alte Oper via Mainzer Landstrasse to the Gallus district. In front of Haus Gallus, the police declared the officially registered rally to be over prematurely and immediately attacked the participants with truncheons and two water cannons.

On Sunday, a representative of an alliance called “Wer hat der gibt” (Whoever has, gives) reported on the massive police brutality on the “Hessenschau” news programme. The police had stormed into the crowd and “clubbed, beaten, kicked and knowingly caused serious injuries.” As a result, over 20 participants suffered injuries, including a “fractured skull base, multiple concussions, broken hands and severe hematoma and bruising.”

By Monday afternoon, the police had still not officially commented on the reason for their brutal attack and did not even disclose the exact number of arrests. From media reports, it can be concluded that the police sought to justify their intervention with the firing of pyrotechnics and alleged stone-throwing from within the demonstration. The choice of location, however, was a real provocation: a water cannon was placed exactly where the anti-fascist Günter Sare was run over and killed by a police water cannon in 1985.

The police assault, not the first of its kind in recent times, shows the nervousness of the municipal authorities and the bourgeoisie behind them, who know that they face growing resistance from the working class. The struggle of the WISAG workers exemplifies this.



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