

New layoffs at Frankfurt airport

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Among workers hit by mass layoffs in Germany's air transport industry, employees of WISAG were among the first to react. At Frankfurt Airport, dozens went on hunger strike in February. They have protested there every week since against their illegitimate dismissal.

Just recently, another WISAG operation at Frankfurt Airport announced mass redundancies. Aviation Service GmbH (ASG), which belongs to the Wisser Group, laid off 87 of the 610 workers still employed there. Before the pandemic, there were almost 800 staff, but all temporary employees and agency workers had already been dismissed. ASG is responsible for aircraft interior cleaning and transport services. As with the WISAG workers, numerous long-serving, experienced workers, as well as 12 severely disabled people, are being fired for cost-savings.

Airport operator Fraport, security provider FraSec, Airport Personal Service GmbH and Lufthansa are also systematically realising their plans to further enrich themselves in the pandemic and to ensure shareholders benefit.

Fraport boss Stefan Schulte made this clear at the quarterly press conference on Friday, May 14. "We have used the crisis to reduce our costs significantly and to make our company leaner and more efficient," he boasted. What this means in plain language is shown by the figures. The Rhein-Main Airport operator has cut around 4,000 full-time positions since the beginning of 2020, reducing its personnel costs by 250 million euros. In Frankfurt, Fraport is currently destroying another 500 jobs.

The biggest jobs massacre is taking place at Lufthansa. Since the beginning of the crisis, the national carrier has cut up to 60,000 jobs, or 43 percent of its total worldwide workforce of 138,000.

But the airlines generally assume that flying will quickly pick up again. "The desire to travel is unbroken," the Fraport CEO said at the press

conference. Supported by the vaccination campaign and extensive testing, "we assume that we will see a significant increase in passenger numbers again in the summer." While these figures have been severely impacted by the pandemic, he said, in terms of cargo volume, Fraport has witnessed massive increases, even surpassing pre-pandemic times. The first quarter of 2021 showed a 7.3 percent increase in cargo at Frankfurt Airport compared to the first quarter of 2019.

Nevertheless, job cuts continue, even among ground workers. More and more companies, like WISAG, are taking the axe to reasonably paid, permanent jobs. Long-time workers are being replaced by young, cheaper and temporary workers and are subjected to ever more brutal workloads. Meanwhile, for those laid off, both the severance pay and the prospects of finding new, comparable jobs in the labour market are getting worse and worse.

To fight back, to protect all workers against job losses, wage theft and the threat of the pandemic, workers must organise themselves independently. In aviation, as in all industry, they must build action committees to link up with their colleagues in other workplaces and at all airports. Above all, they must organise themselves independently of the trade unions, which have long since ceased to represent workers' interests but are committed to defending the profits of big business.

This is particularly clear at the Frankfurt airport with regards to Lufthansa. There, the unions Verdi, UFO (cabin crew) and VC (pilots) have voluntarily offered massive wage reductions and savings amounting to billions of euros and have themselves helped to push them through. For ground staff, 50 percent of wage costs are now being cut through a "voluntary" income waiver that represents a "new dimension of trade union sell-outs," as the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in early December 2020. Verdi did not lift a finger in the

fight against the WISAG dismissals either, and workers acknowledged this by placing a black wreath in front of Verdi headquarters in Frankfurt.

But even the smaller sectoral union IGL, which the WISAG workers have joined, does not have a significantly different perspective than that Verdi or IG Bau (whose representatives sit on the works council at ASG). For example, a declaration of loyalty by the unions assuring Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr of their “support in all necessary measures to stabilise our group in these difficult times” bears the signatures not only of the secretaries of Verdi, UFO and VC, but also of the IGL secretaries Daniel Wollenberg and Thorsten Spreu.

On 12 May, the IGL carried a webcast on the struggle of the WISAG workers (“Still dismissed after six months now”). Two WISAG workers, Habip Bektas and Ertugrul Kurnaz, who are both actively involved in the struggle against the illegitimate dismissals, were invited to speak. It is clear from this webcast that IGL officials and workers have vastly different perspectives.

Bektas made it clear that no severance pay can replace a job. Originally, WISAG only wanted to pay workers pitiful severance pay of 3,500 to 4,500 euros, even though they had worked at the airport for 20, 30 or 40 years. In the meantime, at the court conciliation hearings, these sums were slightly increased to about 20,000 euros. But, as Habip noted: “Even if I got 40,000 euros—this amount would probably be enough for one year, but then it’s over! I still have to continue working for another 20 years, and that would be a huge loss.” He said he would continue to fight.

Both WISAG workers stressed that illegal dismissals were more and more becoming a general business model for all corporations. “At WISAG, there is planned action behind it,” said Kurnaz. He added that WISAG also used the same vile practices in Berlin.

Habip added: “Other companies will follow suit. There is a system behind it: It’s a wage-dumping spiral that pulls everything down.”

In contrast, IGL leader Thomas Klappert made it very clear in the discussion that he has “complete understanding” for the employers’ side. “It has to be said, in aviation, the employers are also pretty much in trouble at the moment, because we are not picking up speed.” Against his better judgement, he claimed that there were “quite good examples like Lufthansa, which

first of all says: we are keeping the people on board.” In reality, Lufthansa is destroying 60,000 jobs!

The prerequisite, Klappert continued, was, “Of course, the work has to return.” At the end of the discussion, Klappert appealed on behalf of the IGL to “Mr. Wisser and Mr. Dietrich. You are in charge. ... Talk to us and make sure that we come to solutions.” He could not show more clearly that the primary goal of the IGL is to be accepted as a negotiating partner by corporations like Lufthansa and WISAG.

In contrast, Bektas appealed to his fellow workers: “To all colleagues who work at the airport or around it: It could happen to you in the same way. You too can be dismissed and end up in a situation like us. Therefore, stand up and support us!” Before that, he repeatedly says in the discussion: “We workers have a right to our job. ... It is important to me that we keep our jobs. This struggle of the working class will continue.”

WISAG patriarch Claus Wisser has meanwhile commented on the dismissals. He said that he had “withdrawn as head of the company and left all decisions to the junior—his son,” and therefore he could “no longer do anything for the WISAG workers.” This is, of course, just humbug. As a member of the supervisory board, Claus Wisser Senior still holds all the strings, and no decision is made against his express will.

The coronavirus pandemic has made it clear that to secure profits, capitalism will trample over corpses. While at least 3.4 million people worldwide and almost 87,000 in Germany have already died from COVID-19, the corporate bosses, bankers and super-rich are using the pandemic to increase profits. For 15 months, federal and state governments have refused to consistently shut down unessential businesses and schools, with financial compensation to those affected, to get a grip on the pandemic. Instead, they are throwing huge sums in the craws of the corporations and banks, which they then cut out of the ribs of the working class.



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