

German trade unions support destruction of jobs and worksite closures at Lufthansa Technik

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Hundreds of Lufthansa workers protested on Wednesday, June 2, against planned worksite closures and partial shutdowns at the German airline's line maintenance operations. Lufthansa Technik GmbH, a subsidiary controlled 100 percent by Lufthansa, plans to close its worksites in Bremen, Düsseldorf, Hannover, and Leipzig, while the closure of sites in Hamburg and Frankfurt is taking place in stages. Out of a total of 1,350 jobs, 780 are at immediate risk. Around 180 workers protested in Frankfurt and about 230 in Hamburg against the airline's job-cutting plan.

The layoffs at the Lufthansa Technik sites are part of the massive restructuring plan being implemented by Lufthansa, using the coronavirus pandemic as a pretext. In reality, the planned job cuts had long been waiting in the desk drawer of airline chief executive Karsten Spohr. A Lufthansa spokesperson confirmed this with the remark, "The air travel crisis of course makes it necessary to undertake changes, the necessity for which were already apparent prior to the crisis." Although Lufthansa received €9 billion last year from the German government's emergency COVID-19 bailout, the company destroyed 60,000 jobs worldwide.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been warning for many months that the pandemic is not merely the product of a natural disaster. The explosive spread of the virus is the direct result of the capitalist "profits before lives" policy, which is aimed at sending workers into dangerous workplaces and their children back into school. At the same time, hundreds of billions of euros were pumped into the major corporations and banks in the name of coronavirus emergency bailouts.

The bill is now being paid by the working class in the form of layoffs, plant shutdowns, and attacks on workers' benefits secured over decades of struggle. Lufthansa

provides a prime example of this. In May 2020, its business report noted a total of 138,000 employees, while today it is officially 110,000, or 28,000 fewer. Tens of thousands of additional jobs face destruction, entire business areas will be outsourced, and collectively bargained pay rates decimated. At the company's annual shareholder meeting on May 4, the board confirmed its intention to axe a further 10,000 full-time jobs, including compulsory redundancies. The stock market backed the plan, driving up the price of Lufthansa shares.

While a job at Lufthansa guaranteed a secure, decent-paying job once upon a time, the airline now conducts blatant wage dumping. This was underscored in a recent *Report Mainz* segment on the closure of Lufthansa subsidiaries GermanWings and SunExpress Deutschland. Laid-off pilots and flight attendants are attempting to be rehired by the newly established company EuroWings Discover, but are either being turned away or rehired on the basis of sweeping wage cuts and part-time contracts. Almost all new hires are temporary.

Under these conditions, it is necessary for workers to take matters into their own hands. The WSW and Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) propose the building of rank-and-file action committees to cooperate across company and national divisions in order to lead a struggle against these attacks and for decent-paying, secure jobs for all. To this end, the International Committee of the Fourth International, to which the SGP belongs, has founded the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Its goal is to develop a conscious international movement of the working class.

This requires above all a break with the nationalist and essentially anti-worker orientation of the trade unions. All of the crisis contracts agreed at Lufthansa over the past year to impose layoffs, shutdowns, and wage cuts were

signed by the trade unions active at the company. These include Verdi, VC (Cockpit Association), and UFO (Independent Organisation of Flight Attendants). They all agreed last year to income reductions totalling €1.3 billion, including the elimination of holiday pay and Christmas bonuses for ground crew and technical workers, and a wage freeze and cancellation of all benefits until the end of 2021.

These voluntary income reductions in the billions were described by the *World Socialist Web Site* as “a new dimension of trade union sellouts.” The trade union leaders are not workers’ representatives, but co-managers for the company. Verdi’s Christine Behele is also deputy chair of Lufthansa’s supervisory board. The trade unions have fully embraced the capitalist business model, placing the competitiveness of Lufthansa on the world market ahead of the interests of workers and their families.

Already on April 6, 2020, the trade unions published a declaration of loyalty to the “Dear Herr Executives” of German Lufthansa, in which they explicitly declared their “support for all necessary measures to stabilise our company in these difficult times.” The IGL (Industrial Air Traffic Union) and TGL (Technical Air Travel Union) also signed this document of utter capitulation.

The rallies held last week in Frankfurt and Hamburg are part of the trade unions’ strategy of stabilising the company. On the one hand, they are aimed at concealing the fact that the union leaders have long ago accepted and signed off on the job cuts and worksite shutdowns. On the other, they serve to control the mounting anger in the workforce.

Verdi, which called for the protests, claimed to be surprised by the prospect of compulsory redundancies and accused Spohr of making “wrong business decisions.” Verdi trade union secretary Uwe Schramm made this point in a press release from Verdi in the state of Hesse. At the same time, he stoked illusions in the German federal government, claiming that it is working “at all levels during the current coronavirus crisis for the retention of Lufthansa and its jobs.”

Workers must interpret this as a declaration of hostility to their interests. The reality is that the federal Grand Coalition government has nothing but contempt for the interests of workers. Its ruthless “profits before lives” policy has produced close to 90,000 coronavirus deaths in Germany alone. The attacks at Lufthansa are also being encouraged by the government. The government even previously urged that job cuts be imposed at an even faster pace.

The unions support this course and do everything in their power to pit workers at different plants, companies, and subcontractors against each other, and divide them. At one of the airports, Verdi is bitterly complaining about the fact that Lufthansa has outsourced the Line Maintenance division for EuroWings at its main site in Düsseldorf to an external competitor of Lufthansa Technik.

The fate of WISAG service workers at the Frankfurt airport demonstrates the consequences this will have for workers at the suppliers, service providers, and subcontractors. The service company WISAG, controlled by the Frankfurt oligarch Claus Wisser, is an expert in exploiting the pandemic for ruthless and illegitimate layoffs planned long before the crisis. At the end of last year, WISAG laid off 230 experienced workers, who had worked at the airport for 20, 30, and even 40 years, throwing them on the streets with ridiculous compensation packages of €3,000 or €4,000.

Under the slogan “Today us, tomorrow you,” a group of these workers took up the struggle against their layoff and organised a series of rallies and an eight-day hunger strike at Frankfurt airport’s Terminal 1. The WISAG workers laid a black funeral wreath in front of the Verdi headquarters because the union did nothing to protect their jobs.

Since then, it has been revealed that a second company under the WISAG Group is carrying out layoffs. At Aviation Services GmbH (ASG), 87 workers have been laid off. Those targeted are precisely the workers who have decades of experience at the airport, and they have been offered ridiculous “social plans” like the WISAG workers.

At ASG, the unions affiliated with the German Union Confederation (DGB) have shown that they serve the interests of the corporations and the capitalist profit system, not those of the workers. At ASG, which is responsible for cleaning the interior of aircraft, workers are part of the IG Bau union. The union authored an online letter in which it stated that it had been aware of the impending layoffs since July 2020.



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