

Warning strikes after no agreement reached for German airport security staff

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The contract struggle by airport security staff is widening. Negotiations in Berlin last Thursday failed to reach an agreement in a fourth round of negotiations, and new talks were postponed until Thursday, March 24. Warning strikes are taking place today in Frankfurt, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Hanover, Stuttgart, Düsseldorf and Köln/Bonn.

Nationwide, around 25,000 workers are employed in passenger and cargo screening at airports. Since the beginning of the pandemic, these workers have worked continuously on the front lines despite the risk of infection by COVID-19 and its many variants. At the same time, job cuts have led to unprecedented levels of stress.

In addition, the workers are being hit in their pockets. Inflation has been rising for months and has reached new highs due to the recent anti-Russian sanctions. Faced with skyrocketing petrol prices, workers are forced to rely on their own cars to cover their irregular round-the-clock shift work.

Last week, the high turnout by workers for short term “warning strikes” showed that security staff are capable of paralysing entire flight plans: On Monday, March 14, strikes were held at Berlin, Düsseldorf, Cologne/Bonn, Bremen, Hanover and Leipzig airports, followed by an all-day strike at Frankfurt’s Rhein-Main Airport on March 15. In Munich, the warning strike that had started on Monday afternoon continued throughout Tuesday. There were broad empty spaces in the airport halls after passengers had been instructed to stay at home. Several hundred flights were cancelled.

The German public service union Verdi is demanding a wage increase of one euro per hour for all aviation security staff for a period of 12 months. In addition, the union has demanded an end to the regulation stipulating that security staff receive a full salary only after their

first two years of service are completed.

These demands have been categorically rejected by the Federal Association of Aviation Security Companies (BDLS). The association, which, apart from the Fraport subsidiary FraSec, also includes companies such as Securitas, DWS and WISAG, has so far offered a maximum 38 cent hourly wage increase for a period of two years.

BDLS negotiator Rainer Friebertshäuser described the security workers’ demands as “completely excessive and unrealistic.” He said the strikes had caused massive damage to air traffic and Verdi had lost all sense of proportion.

Friebertshäuser argued that the pay of security staff was already higher than that of many other airport workers. He should know. The managing director and labour director of FraSec has been a member of the Social Democratic Party, the union and Verdi for 40 years. Like so many union functionaries, Friebertshäuser officially switched sides and now works to assert the interests of the corporation against airport employees.

Friebertshäuser is well aware of the numerous lousy deals Verdi has struck with Fraport, Lufthansa, WISAG and many other airport companies in recent years. Especially since the beginning of the pandemic, these companies have taken advantage of the situation to push through new start-ups, site closures and wage cuts with the help of the trade unions.

Lufthansa alone has already cut tens of thousands of jobs despite receiving billions in state aid during the pandemic crisis. At WISAG, more than 300 workers who had worked at the airport for decades were dismissed and replaced by low-wage workers. A year ago, WISAG workers went on a hunger strike to protest their sackings.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party warn airport workers not to put their trust in Verdi. We call for the building of action committees to act independently of Verdi and to make contact with colleagues in other industries across Europe. The WISAG workers have already come to the conclusion that Verdi had betrayed their struggle and have laid a black funeral wreath in front of Verdi headquarters.

Together with IG Metall and the DGB (German Trade Union Federation), Verdi has taken on the function of an unofficial “fourth wheel” of the ruling three-party coalition in Berlin. The union is trying to use the warning strikes to permit workers to “blow off steam” and channel the growing resistance. In the past two weeks alone, the service union has organised warning strikes at Amazon, among retail shop assistants, at Postfinanz and among kindergarten teachers. The unions have isolated all of these actions.

Many millions of workers are employed in the service sector, logistics, retail and public service sector, which includes schools, day-care centres, local transport, the health care sector and much more. These many millions of workers are collectively capable of shutting down the entire society. Such joint action becomes all the more urgent as the Ukraine war expands in Eastern Europe and the threat of a third world war looms.

For its part, Verdi is doing everything in its power to prevent the growth of social resistance. On the question of war, the Verdi leadership shares the positions of the German government and supports sanctions against Russia. This was made clear by Verdi leader Frank Werneke (SPD) just three days after the war began. Germany has the responsibility to “restore peace,” Werneke told a rally in Berlin. Therefore, it was “appropriate and necessary to react with sanctions.” IG Metall and the German trade union federation (DGB) have made similar, unequivocal declarations of loyalty to the official German war policy.

The WSWS has commented: “It doesn’t even occur to the well-paid bureaucrats in the union headquarters that Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine can also be opposed on a principled, left-wing basis without supporting NATO.”

In Pisa last week, Italian airport workers refused to load weapons for Ukraine, arguing quite correctly that their colleagues in Kiev or Lviv who would have to

load the cargo would be the first to fall victim to bombings. “We cannot justify that,” stated airport apron workers in Pisa. Although Italian trade union leaders and politicians quickly succeeded in transforming the courageous initiative into a harmless protest, the apron workers proved that workers can and are ready to take up a principled struggle against war.

All over the world, workers are taking part in strikes and mass protests against job cuts, social inequality and the governments’ criminal COVID-19 policies. Now, when war and existential dangers for all of humanity are at stake, the working class is the only force which, due to its social position, can provide a progressive alternative. It must oppose the moves to universal rearmament and the murderous sanctions regime of NATO governments by unifying the international working class on the basis of a socialist programme.



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