

Strike by airport security staff halts hundreds of flights across Germany

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23 March 2022

Once again, a protest strike by security staff has brought flight operations in Germany to a virtual standstill. At eight airports—Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, Stuttgart, Cologne/Bonn, and Düsseldorf—there was almost 100 percent support for Tuesday’s strike by security personnel. Passengers could only disembark at these airports and could not take off. Several hundred flights had to be cancelled.

The employers’ association, the Federal Association of Aviation Security Companies (BDLS), rigorously refuses to negotiate seriously on the workers’ demands. It firmly rejects even the very limited demand to increase the hourly wage of security staff by one euro and to equalise wages nationwide. Talks are to continue next Thursday in Raunheim, Hesse.

Many workers are angry, forcing service sector union Verdi to call an almost nationwide, all-day protest strike. The turnout made it clear the strength and power airport security staff wield.

At the largest hub in Frankfurt, there was only emergency service. According to the operator Fraport, 108 of 790 planned flights were cancelled by noon. Severe restrictions were also reported from Berlin and Hamburg. Hamburg airport reported that all 88 planned departures had to be cancelled. At Berlin-Brandenburg airport, according to a spokeswoman, about 100 of 150 planned departures were cancelled, and of the 150 or so arrivals, about 50 were cancelled.

At Düsseldorf Airport, 140 out of 260 departures and arrivals were cancelled, at Cologne Bonn Airport 50 of 60 take-offs could not take place, and in Stuttgart, 40 of 50 departures were cancelled.

The German Air Transport Association angrily called the strike disproportionate.

However, despite the security workers’ willingness to fight and the enormous solidarity among other airport

staff, Verdi is working towards a rotten compromise. The employers’ association’s negotiators know the union well since they used to be Verdi and German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) officials themselves.

Negotiator Rainer Friebertshäuser and other representatives of the aviation industry have criticised the workers’ demands as “unrealistic” and indignantly claim they would lead to a 40 percent wage increase. Matthias von Randow, BDLS Chief Executive, even declared that the workers were “putting at risk the economic revival after the pandemic-related collapse” with their demands.

Both Friebertshäuser and von Randow are long-time Social Democratic Party (SPD) and union members. Von Randow previously served as Head of Division of the DGB Federal Executive Committee, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Transport and Director of Air Berlin. Friebertshäuser, after 40 years of Verdi membership, is now the labour director of FraSec, the subsidiary of the Frankfurt airport operator Fraport.

Several strikers at Frankfurt’s Terminal 1 spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the angry outburst by management.

Rainer, who has worked in airport security for over twenty years, said, “We should make demands in double digits from the start. Judging by the wage sacrifices during the pandemic and the last few years, the constantly rising prices and the inflation that is yet to come, that would be appropriate and necessary.”

His colleague described how “We have shifts here around the clock. Many come from far away and already pay double for petrol now. Others have to finance a small second home or a room around here.”

Andrea, who has worked at the airport for 15 years, raised the question: “Where has all the money gone?”

The corporations have collected billions in the pandemic, but workers are supposed to do without.” When told that the government was in the process of raising an extra 100 billion euros for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) to prepare for World War III, Andrea said, “It’s all madness, it will only lead to more war. Nobody wants that.”

Another worker said, “They’d better give us more money. We managed relatively well the last few years. But now everything is getting more expensive, and there is really a lot of work stress here because so many colleagues have had to leave and have not been replaced.”

Wolfgang, who has worked in airport control for 18 years, explained that at least ten percent of the workforce has been cut during the pandemic. “Everyone with a temporary contract had to leave because the [government’s] short-time allowance wasn’t paid for them,” he reported. “In addition, contracts were terminated with long-time colleagues who still had contracts as public service employees.”

When airport control was privatised, these workers were subjected to special arrangements under EU law. “These contracts have all now expired, and so colleagues with 30 years of experience have had to resign,” they said.

Wolfgang and his colleagues also witnessed how the service provider WISAG at Frankfurt Airport dismissed long-time workers overnight and replaced them with temporary staff. They agreed that airport workers must fight together not to be divided and played off against each other.

Wolfgang told how he had started at the airport with an hourly wage of 7.50 euro: “Little by little we worked our way up, and thanks to the big strike of 2014 we finally had halfway decent wages.”

Today, however, workers were confronted with the fact that the shareholders “only skim off the profits.” He did not see why the workers should give up their demands: “There is money for everything. They pulled 100 billion euro out of a hat for the Bundeswehr, but we are supposed to do all the work with far too few staff.”

Commenting on the fact that senior Verdi officials like Friebertshäuser openly switch sides, Wolfgang said, “For union officials above a certain pay grade, this is just a job like any other. That’s why they grab it

if someone offers them an even more lucrative career.”

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) members explained the need for workers to organise themselves into rank-and-file committees that can act independently of Verdi and network with their colleagues in the other workplaces and at all sites in Europe.

Shown the SGP leaflet—‘No third world war! Against Ukraine war, NATO aggression and German rearmament!’—Wolfgang said he would support all workers uniting against the war and standing together against the insane military build-up. For him it was “particularly nasty that Russian migrants are now to be discriminated against.” He said this reminded him vividly of Hitler’s Third Reich: “Just as they acted against the Jews then, they want to take action against the Russians today. We must not allow that.”



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