

German unions agree to below inflation “wage rise” for airport security workers

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On Monday, the services union Verdi and the Federal Association of Aviation Security (BDLS) agreed a new contract for airport security workers. However, this does not solve a single problem for the workers since the agreed wage increases are well below the current level of inflation.

The agreement is an attempt by the employers, with the help of Verdi, to suppress the growing resistance at Germany’s airports. Nationwide, about 25,000 workers are employed in airport security. The new contract binds them to a no-industrial-action obligation for two years. Verdi had originally announced it would only agree a 12-month deal, however, the new contract runs for 24 months, from January 2022 to January 2024.

The new pay rates fall well short of the current level of inflation, which means a cut in real wages. Inflation was already running at 7.3 percent at the end of March, according to the Federal Statistical Office, and it will keep rising. “In February, inflation was still at 5.1 percent,” the official statement of March 30 said. “In Hesse, inflation rose to 8.0 percent, the highest level in 48 years.”

The price of petrol has also long since climbed above €2 per litre. Most airport security workers rely on their own car—or even more expensive secondary accommodation—because of their irregular round-the-clock shift work.

A look at the details shows how far the agreed wage increases fall below the price hikes.

The top pay grade, covering passenger and baggage screeners, will be aligned with that of aviation security assistants. Their wages will rise by 8.3 percent in three steps over two years. Only this grade will see the first 80 cents introduced retroactively to January 1, 2022. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that they are being fobbed off with a wage rise of 4.15 percent per year,

which means a real wage decrease of 3 percent per year at current inflation levels.

Wage increases in grades covering staff and goods control vary depending on the federal state in which they work. Some particularly low wages will be raised to the higher level of other colleagues over the next two years, which has led to business owners whining about the “special burden” of this long overdue measure. In general, however, the pay increase for these grades is also less than 5 percent per year, also far below the rate of inflation.

In the lowest wage grade, which has so far been fobbed off with an hourly rate of €12.32, wages will rise to €13.83 within two years. So here, too, an increase of just over 12 percent over two years equates to just 6 percent per year, again well below the inflation rate of 7 or 8 percent. And all those in this grade also must pay high petrol prices for their long daily commutes.

Lost wages from the period staff were put on short-time working, when airports were temporarily closed at the beginning of the pandemic, have never been compensated. Regardless, airport workers toiled through on the front line since the beginning of the pandemic, despite the great risk of infection. Many are unhappy and angry because at least 10 percent of the workforce was laid off during this period. The job cuts led to staff shortages and unprecedented permanent stress.

For these reasons, Verdi felt compelled to call two full-day warning strikes during the negotiations, on March 14/15 and 22, which showed that the security workers can paralyse the entire flight operations. But despite the great willingness to fight and the visible solidarity of their colleagues at the airports, Verdi has now agreed to this sell-out contract.

It joins the numerous lousy deals of the last years at Fraport, Lufthansa, WISAG and many other airport companies. Especially since the beginning of the pandemic, corporations have dropped any inhibitions and, with the help of the trade unions, have carried out spinoffs, site closures, mass sackings and wage cuts.

In the Länder (federal states), Verdi, together with the state governments, already made it clear last autumn that the union shares the “profits before lives” policy of the corporations and banks when it comes to the public sector. They have imposed a wage freeze on blue- and white-collar workers in hospitals, schools and public authorities until December 2022.

Now, the industrial action by airport security workers has been sold out. Next up is the dispute in social and educational services where Verdi is negotiating for 330,000 workers, mainly in nurseries and schools. Following a well-established pattern, Verdi carefully separates all industrial disputes to keep them under control and sell them out one by one.

The close relationship between the union leadership and management is particularly evident at airports, where Verdi officials are on a first-name basis with company managers.

The BDLS negotiators are also long-time union members. Their spokesperson, Rainer Friebertshäuser, was a Verdi member and official for 40 years before he moved to the post of labour director of FraSec, the subsidiary of the Frankfurt airport operator Fraport.

Matthias von Randow, general manager of the German Air Transport Association (BDL), was a head of department at the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), then a state secretary in the Federal Ministry of Transport and a director of Air Berlin. In the same way, today’s trade union leaders easily move to the boardroom or government bench when the opportunity arises.

Workers have no such lucrative opportunities. They are left with all the costs: the costs of years of social cuts, privatisation and deregulation, as well as the costs of the pandemic, both health and financial.

Now they are being saddled with the costs of the Ukraine war. The coalition government headed by social democrat Olaf Schulz has just pulled an additional €100 billion out of the hat for the Bundeswehr (armed forces). Politicians are openly talking about a nuclear-armed Germany and a world

war, and workers will pay for it. Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier calls for “sacrifices” for the war effort and to ensure profits continue to flow for German big business. Verdi and the other DGB unions stand firmly on his side.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) are calling for the establishment of rank-and-file committees for workers to take the defence of their interests into their own hands independently of the trade unions. All those who are no longer prepared to risk health and life for the national interests of the German economy and the enrichment of a narrow upper-class layer are invited to make contact with us.



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