German Airport security staff go on 24-hour warning strike

Our reporters
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On Thursday, February 1, striking airport staff brought 11 major German airports to a standstill. A 24-hour warning strike by security staff paralysed Berlin-Brandenburg, Frankfurt, Cologne-Bonn, Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart, Leipzig-Halle, Dresden and Erfurt-Weimar airports. Over a thousand flights were cancelled with around 200,000 passengers affected.

Around 25,000 security staff employed in passenger, personnel and cargo screening and in the service area took part in the industrial action, demanding better wages and overtime pay. The Verdi union is currently demanding 2.80 euros more per hour and an increase in overtime pay of 30 percent to commence from the first hour of overtime. The latest, provocative offer from the Federal Association of Aviation Security Companies (BDLS) provides for a miserly wage increase of 4 percent for 2024 and a further 3 percent for 2025. Negotiations will continue on February 6 in Berlin.

Even if fully realised, Verdi's demands would in no way cover the employees' actual needs. Security personnel have had to accept real wage cuts for years. This is because at all German airports, except for Munich and Nuremberg (which were not on strike), the security areas have been separated from the public sector and been privatised in past years—with the result that wages have deteriorated while workloads and stress have substantially increased.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to strikers in Berlin about their grievances. Due to their irregular shift times, most security workers are dependent on their own car to travel to work, despite skyrocketing petrol prices. Some employees who live far away even have to pay for secondary accommodation close to the airport. Added to this is the ever-increasing work stress. Jobs cut at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 have never been replaced. In addition to the permanent staff shortage, there is a high sickness rate, which leads to constant additional shifts and unprecedented ongoing stress.

"We are regularly over-scheduled," Jordan, an employee at Berlin Brandenburg Airport (BER), told WSWS reporters. "As soon as the volume of flights increases, things really ramp up."

"We have an endless shortage of staff," confirms Dave, who also works at BER. He explains: "We are sometimes on the assembly line for six hours without a break." As a result, "people are constantly quitting," and not just new employees, but also colleagues who have been with the company for ten years or more.

The employers' offer is laughable, according to the workers' unanimous opinion. "It doesn't even come close to covering our real costs," Jordan said. "Basically, we're just tools for them, nothing more. Not real people."

The warning strikes, like the recent train drivers' strike, have once again demonstrated the enormous power of the working class. The security strike took place in the midst of a wave of strikes in Germany. Following the train drivers strike, doctors at all university hospitals went on strike on Tuesday, and on Friday bus, underground and tram drivers stopped work and paralysed local public transport. Strikes will also continue at some airports with ground handling service staff taking action.

However, the wave of strikes extends far beyond Germany. In Finland, several air transport unions are striking on February 1-2, forcing Finnair to announce 500 flight cancellations. In France strike action is planned commencing February 5 to protest against the Olympic Games due to take place this summer in Paris. In the UK, several strikes will take place over the next

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few days in the air transport, rail and London Underground sectors. There will also be nationwide rail strikes in Italy on February 5 and 12 and strikes at Milan Malpensa and Linate airports on February 9. Additional militant protests by farmers' protests are planned in Germany, France, Belgium, Poland and Greece.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are fighting for the establishment of action committees in every sector so that these struggles can be networked and armed with a socialist perspective. Above all, the struggles must be taken out of the hands of the trade unions if they are to be successful.

In the key security sector, the German public service trade union Verdi is not prepared to take any resolute industrial action for better wages and conditions. In common with the German trade union federation (DGB), Verdi is deeply integrated into the German economy and linked to the main political parties. It accepts the capitalist "necessity" that employees ultimately have to pay for the costs of war and austerity policies.

With the warning strike, Verdi is merely creating an outlet for the workforce to express their anger at their exploitative conditions for just one day. This will change absolutely nothing and was already evident during the last one day warning strike two years ago. Just a few days later, Verdi concluded a new contract, which did nothing to change either the deterioration in lagging wages or the constantly increasing workload. Even today, the union opposes any substantial struggle, and systematically isolates one section of workers from all others taking action.

The Federal Association of Aviation Security Companies (BDLS) is well aware of this. Matthias von Randow, chief executive of the BDLS, who has rejected the demands in the security sector outright as "unaffordable," was himself employed at the beginning of his career by the DGB and the SPD as a full-time official for ten years. He was initially head of a DGB project for European educational work and head of department at the DGB executive committee, and later head of department at the SPD executive committee. The German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) made him State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Transport before he became Director of Air Berlin 15 years ago, and from 2011 general manager of the Federal Association of the German Air Transport Industry.

Verdi negotiator Christine Behle (SPD) is also fully integrated into Germany's corporate sector and is committed to preserving capitalism. The Verdi deputy chair has been a member of the Lufthansa supervisory board for years and was re-elected as deputy chairwoman of its supervisory board last year.

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