

Security personnel at German airports continue protest strikes

By K. Nesan and Marianne Arens
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Security staff at three airports across Germany went on strike again Thursday for better pay and working conditions. Security personnel at Stuttgart, Cologne/Bonn and Düsseldorf airports took part in the all-day protest strike. Protest strikes had already taken place at Berlin Tegel and Schoenefeld on Monday. A further strike by security is expected to disrupt flights Tuesday at Frankfurt Airport, the largest airport in the country.

Almost 650 flights, well over half, had to be cancelled Thursday: 131 of them at Cologne/Bonn (out of 199), 370 at Düsseldorf (out of 570) and 142 flights (out of 275) planned at Stuttgart.

The workers, who are employed by different companies, including Fraport Security and Securitas Aviation, started their strike at 3:00 a.m. with the early shift. At Cologne/Bonn airport, the strike began at midnight, as there is no ban on night flights at this location.

The work stoppages make clear the enormous anger of security staff and their willingness to fight. They confront extremely stressful working conditions combined with meagre salaries.

There is a great deal of sympathy and solidarity with the strike among the wider population. “Everybody wants to earn his or her money, so I think the strike is right”, said one person in Düsseldorf, even though he lost a lot of time due to the strike and had to travel by bus from Düsseldorf to Paderborn.

Virtually all those affected who were interviewed by TV reporters expressed their understanding for the strike. One traveller said, “You have to see the big picture. We have had a miserable wage development here in the last year and a half. This is the result now.” Another says, “I have nothing against the strike, I can understand their anger.”

A woman who had to put up with a longer wait said, “People have to get their money too. Of course, it’s daft that it’s us who are affected. But when they achieve their goal, it should be okay.” A business traveller in Stuttgart said that although he was experiencing great difficulties due to the strike, he sympathized with the aim of the strikers.

There is no doubt that the security staff—and many other airport workers who have recently gone on strike—are prepared to take up a serious fight for a fundamental change in their miserable situation.

However, they cannot effectively defend their interests if the Verdi union controls their industrial action.

Verdi already conducted four negotiations last year with the German Air Security Association (BDLS), most recently on December 20 and 21. The employers are not prepared to raise wages by more than two percent per year—for many workers that is just forty cents more per hour.

The companies who work as subcontractors of the Federal Police at the airports formed BDLS in 2018. This is why Verdi is now, for the first time, negotiating a nationwide contract with this new employers’ association in Berlin. Nevertheless, according to the employers, East German workers should not receive the same salary as their colleagues in the West for another five years.

A discussion with two representatives of Verdi in Baden-Württemberg was very illuminating. Both made it clear that Verdi had no intention of mobilizing workers together to effectively push through the goal of a 20 euros hourly wages for all.

Questioned whether it would not make sense to strike together for a uniform nationwide wage, Verdi secretary Dominik Bollinger said this was not possible.

There were “clearly defined negotiation procedures, we must adhere to them... There is the Friedenspflicht [a union-agreed pledge of ‘industrial peace’]. There’s no point in escalating a negotiation.”

“We are conducting negotiations with the employer with a view to reaching agreement,” Bollinger continued. He made clear that Verdi had never seriously accepted the aim of 20 euros for all, when he added that “one must also be able to lose”.

Eva Schmidt, head of the services department in Baden-Württemberg, explained, “We are only in the protest strike phase and not an all-out strike.” Verdi wanted to “give employers the chance to call us back to the negotiating table with a better offer before 23 January”.

A reporter from the *World Socialist Web Site* raised the question of a joint strike by all airport workers. He pointed out that strikes had been happening at airports for several years: among ground staff, against exploitation at Ryanair, among Lufthansa crews—pilots and flight attendants, against dismissals following the Air-Berlin bankruptcy, etc. “Wouldn’t a joint strike make sense?”

The Verdi officials immediately sought to play down the issue. Schmidt said that these were all “different areas, different collective agreements with different terms.” She was only responsible for security personnel, but not for the other areas.

The WSWS reporter then confronted the Verdi functionaries with the fact that the “yellow vests” protests in France had originated outside the trade unions and independently of them. Neither Schmidt nor Bollinger wanted anything to do with this and spoke out against the yellow vest demonstrations.

“The protest in France takes place in completely different conditions,” declared Bollinger, there was a “completely different legal basis” in France. His colleague argued, “France has a very different strike culture.”

Significantly, both immediately resorted to the slanders that were spread in the bourgeois media about the “yellow vests.” Schmidt said that she “generally did not think it good to use violence,” and Bollinger stressed that violence against police officers was “unacceptable.”

These statements alone make clear that the security staff cannot achieve their demands through the

negotiations that Verdi is conducting with the BDLS. While the workers are willing to strike and conduct a real struggle for higher wages and better working conditions, Verdi is trying to prevent just that.

Verdi is on the side of the employers’ association and is conducting the fifth round of negotiations “in the spirit of agreement.” This means that Verdi will make sure a compromise is reached that secures the profits and competitiveness of the companies.

Security staff can only effectively fight for their concerns if they begin to organise independently of Verdi. Like autoworkers in the US, who took the first steps at a December 9 meeting in Detroit, they must build action committees linking up with all workers, including those in other areas, establishing contact with airports across Europe and fighting for the international unity of the working class.

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