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Germany

# Retail, aviation, pork, viruses and profits

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**Everything is in everything. Two districts in the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia (Gütersloh and Warendorf), or 600,000 people, were again locked down from 18 June, under threat of Covid-19: restrictions on movement in public space and frequenting bars and restaurants, sports establishments, nurseries and schools.**

Originally, there was the discovery of a “cluster” or “hotspot” as had already been declared several times in these slaughterhouses or rather industrial charcuteries. This time at Tönnies, named after its family owners, a place of slaughter but also of meat processing where 1,553 employees are infected, and 7,000 in total quarantined. The company has 16,500 employees worldwide, it is the largest European “pork producer”, directed by a family who might be called “absolute pigs”: 70 to 80% of the staff are subcontracted, the workforce is mainly made up of employees from central and eastern Europe (Romania, Poland, Bulgaria), housed in filthy homes at the rate of 8 to 10 per room and almost without sanitary facilities, and forced to work without protection for 12 to 14 hours a day while being paid for 8 hours. At work as at home, promiscuity.

This is what Jonas Bohl, the head of the NGG union in the industry, describes in the media, saying he is helpless in the face of the situation due to language problems and extreme exploitation and precariousness. Land leaders (CDU) as well as federal officials roll their eyes but are content with promises of improvement which they do not believe (“pretty much zero” confidence, says the German Federal Minister for Labour!). The Tönnies family or mafia even refused to give the names of the contaminated employees, having less regard for them than cattle. One thing is certain, if the virus is there, profits are too.

## Bosses hit the headlines

At the same time, the news is marked by reports about other big names of the German capitalist planet, in the automobile industry and quite recently in large-scale distribution and aviation. The department store chain “Galeria Karstadt Kaufhof” and its subsidiary “Karstadt Sports” have just obtained from a court and restructuring experts a plan allowing them to close 62 of their 172 sites, hence the elimination of nearly 6,000 jobs. The losses linked to the slowdown in activity for coronavirus provide a convenient scapegoat, because these restructurings and cuts in the workforce succeed others. Big distribution, having already cleaned up its profits by layoffs, is only seizing the opportunity of the coronavirus for pursue them. The boss of the firm, Austrian René Benko, is a self-made man described as the quintessential shark, master in purchases and buyouts in the Germany-Austria-Switzerland area for over twenty years, at the head of an opaque empire backed by the hinterland of the countries of the East (but also the Arab world and South Africa), on good terms moreover with high-ranking political notables.

## Lufthansa and Covid profits

Obviously, the planes remained grounded, but Lufthansa has made a total of more than 9 billion in profits during the past five years (among other things, through layoffs which had given rise to strikes). This time, it won these 9 billion from the state in the form of credits and the purchase of shares (the state will hold 20% of the company's shares) without anything in return: no right to monitor compliance with ecological measures, no control over employment policy - Lufthansa already claims an “overcapacity” of 22,000 jobs, including 11,000 in Germany. Or one job in six cut.

## Retail, aviation, pork, viruses and profits

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Europe's largest capitalist power announces the most ambitious plans for its big profiteers. Normal! Its political leaders even reserve for them, in money allocated for dismissals, a "special favour" ... what is called in German "Extrawurst", or "sausage of choice" ...

*PS:*

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