German flight attendants' strike ends without result

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20 November 2015

On the last day of the Independent Flight Attendants Organisation (UFO) strike on November 13, 941 flight connections were canceled in Frankfurt, Dusseldorf and Munich. All together, the strike resulted in the cancellation of 4,700 flights over six days. A central demonstration and rally took place in Frankfurt last Friday.

The approximately 2,000 flight attendants, who marched from the Rhine-Main air base to Lufthansa headquarters, left no room for doubt that they wanted to fight for their working conditions and social rights. Pilots and ground personnel and even employees of other airlines took part in the demonstration, which showed that the strike had won support from a broad section of the working class.

On the other hand, the union leadership, headed by Nicoley Baublies, used the demonstration to announce that the longest strike in the history of the Lufthansa airline would now come to an end. The corporation had made absolutely no concessions and had repeatedly sought legal action to end the strike, while promising its shareholders and investors that because of low oil prices the strike in November 2015 would have no impact on the company's profits.

UFO also broke off a comprehensive strike three years ago and negotiated a foul compromise with the company. In the November 2012 contract, it accepted the expansion of cheap affiliate companies Germanwings and Eurowings, as well as a new wage structure and worsened working conditions with more-flexible working times.

Lufthansa decided that it wanted to take the next step this year and further degrade the working conditions of Lufthansa air and ground personnel to the level prevailing at its cheap subsidiaries. In particular, the pension scheme of the 19,000 flight attendants has long been a thorn in the side of the company. The company wants to begin dismantling the gains of past struggles, cut benefits and make them more dependent on the capital market.

"The firm is carrying out a policy according to which, in the long term, 65-year-olds and even 67-year-olds will still be in the cabin," a young flight attendant named Christen told the *World Socialist Web Site.* "Since that is not practical in most cases, however, the whole thing amounts to backdoor pension cuts," he said.

Numerous handmade posters on the demonstration also referred to the attacks on transitional retirement benefits: "Lufthansa: I gave you my youth—you take away my retirement" and "Provided security—risked health—end result poverty in old age".

Other posters read: "I don't want to be squeezed like a lemon", "Hedge funds rule the world…Blackrock rules Lufthansa", "Nonstop exploitation" and "United we stand, divided we fall". These posters expressed the fighting spirit of many workers.

A flight attendant told the WSWS: "We should really fight together. Hopefully it isn't too late. If one looks at America, the attacks have already been carried out there. Lufthansa wants to follow suit in order to stay competitive and we will have to bleed for it."

In his remarks at the demonstration, UFO president Baublies made clear that he is on the side of shareholders in this process. He directed his remarks to company management and promised he was ready to collaborate to restructure the corporation.

"We have nothing against Lufthansa management working out how it can stay in the market", said Baublies. His union is "ready to look for solutions together, also in the low-cost segment" he said. "We have absolutely nothing against Eurowings, which

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stands up to Ryanair, Easyjet and Emirate. We have nothing against it, we have made our own contributions."

In fact, UFO has already made several suggestions for retirement provisions that would save the company more than €70 million a year. One UFO publication even refers to "approximately €130 million per year".

The leadership of UFO does not fight to strengthen the position of the workers and employees against the attacks of the company, but serves as a co-manager willing to impose the attacks of the company on the employees.

At the demonstration, Baublies said, "A lot of things that the company management and [Lufthansa CEO] Carsten Spohr have tackled are completely right. He actually has super ideas.... The restructuring is also right: it is also right to say that we need new ideas and that we must deal with the existence of subsidised airlines and airlines that undermine standards. All the unions have helped with this. We have fought together to bring this corporation to the fore."

The only thing Baublies wanted to change was for the company to "include and listen to employees" (by which he meant union functionaries).

Baublies then declared, "This strike is now at an end, everyone must accept this."

Afterwards, the WSWS reporting team discussed with a number of participants in the demonstration. Many workers expressed concern about the bankrupt perspective of the union leadership, and it became clear that this is a topic of discussion among the workers themselves. When the WSWS reporting team suggested that the large demonstration would be followed by a sellout, an older flight attendant said, "That may well be. One never knows in advance what is being worked out behind the scenes."

A flight attendant who has been working for Lufthansa for 20 years read a WSWS article that was distributed at the demonstration and said, "What is going on could lead to a foul compromise. It would definitely be better if, as employees, we would work less with the company and more with our fellow workers at other airlines."

Many flight attendants and ground personnel who attended the demonstration out of solidarity with the strike eagerly discussed how workers could unite their struggles across professions and airlines and beyond national borders.

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