

Eurowings strike grounds domestic German flights

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The 24-hour strike by flight attendants at Eurowings on Thursday practically grounded the entire air fleet of the Lufthansa subsidiary. According to the airline, almost all of its domestic German flights were cancelled and European flights were reduced. At Eurowings' administrative headquarters in Cologne a rally organised by the Independent Flight Attendants' Organisation (Ufo) drew around 150 employees.

In total, 393 out of 551 Eurowings' flights were cancelled in Düsseldorf, Cologne/Bonn, Stuttgart, Hamburg and Berlin. The Lufthansa locations at Frankfurt and Munich were unaffected by the strike.

The aim of the strike was "not the fight for luxury privileges," stated Ufo, but "the question of how to reduce the enormous burdens imposed by collective agreements."

Eurowings circulated reports that the flight attendants were offered an average pay rise of 7 percent, adding in passing that this offer ran over the course of three years and three months.

Ufo lead negotiator Nicoley Baublies stated, "Eurowings' offer of a 7 percent pay increase has only been spread by the media. We never received this offer." Along with a pay increase, Ufo is demanding corresponding provisions for retirement and profit-sharing as exist at other Lufthansa subsidiaries.

The Eurowings board initially thought it could isolate the struggle because only around 400 cabin crew from the Eurowings Deutschland GmbH's 23 planes could participate.

Ufo has repeatedly threatened to strike in the long-running contract dispute and announced strikes for Monday and Tuesday but then repeatedly acceded to offers from management. They called off planned strikes at the beginning of the week at the last minute to continue talks. Then on Tuesday night, talks broke

down without result. At midday on Wednesday, Ufo announced it would take action.

A short time later, Ufo abruptly called upon its members at the larger Lufthansa subsidiary Germanwings to join a 24-hour strike. Germanwings, which is to be merged with Eurowings in the longer term, operates 58 Eurowings planes under a so-called wet-lease contract. Eurowings rents the planes along with the crews. As a result, 81 of the 92 Eurowings planes were affected yesterday by the strike, not just 23.

Ufo, which uses an open collective agreement at Germanwings regulating part-time work, declared negotiations on this a failure on Wednesday evening. This means the Ufo members at Germanwings are in a legal position to strike.

Last Sunday, Ufo informed its members at Germanwings that management had presented for the regulation of part-time working "no viable offer for negotiation despite contrary statements and renewed calls on our part." Ufo also called again on management to negotiate with the union on Monday and Tuesday. "If these deadlines are not met, or no viable offer for talks is presented, we will have to consider whether job action has to be called to exert the necessary pressure on this issue."

This was what happened on Wednesday evening. Baublies defended the strike on Thursday morning's edition of Morgenmagazin on ZDF television, "In the end, the same goals and the same management are involved at both." If the airline was not prepared to compromise, further strikes could be called. Already the previous evening he spoke of a two-day strike to DPA.

Eurowings immediately threatened to take legal action against the strike. "We will now make legal

inquiries about who is responsible for this strike and reserve the right to take corresponding measures,” an Eurowings spokesperson told DPA.

The strike was disproportionate, the airline claimed. Ufo exploited a “seeming conflict” over part-time work to make the larger subsidiary Germanwings “overnight and without warning ready for a strike,” said the spokesperson.

In reality, the strike is more than justified. The Eurowings’ crews are resisting attempts to further reduce their already low wages and pension provisions, and poor working conditions. If the strike was “disproportionate,” then it is so in the opposite sense. The current conflict arose out of Lufthansa’s strategy to cut the wages and benefits of all 120,000 Lufthansa employees to the level of its cut-price airline subsidiary Eurowings. A proportionate response would be a strike by all Lufthansa employees.

With the inclusion of the Germanwings crews, Ufo has taken a small step in resisting the attempt by Lufthansa to play workers off against each other by dividing them into subsidiaries and thus impose wage-dumping. Thus far, the employees of each company, and in addition each group of employees, had been left to fight Lufthansa alone.

But the trade unions, including those like Ufo, Association Cockpit (VC) and others have accepted these divisions. This had the result of artificially separating the struggles and forcing each group of employees to make concessions.

The current strike makes clear how urgent it is to unite all employees at Lufthansa and throughout the airline industry internationally to defend and improve wages, pensions and working conditions.

It is becoming ever clearer that the interests of the airlines’ shareholders are incompatible with those of the workers. The justified demands of the employees, who undertake all the work at the company under increased pressure, can no longer be subordinated to those of the owners of capital.

The trade unions oppose this principled defence of the workers’ interests and pursue a tactic aimed at extracting concessions, not from management, but from workers.

The trade unions associated with the German confederation of trade unions (DGB), such as Verdi in the airline industry, are openly on the side of

management and serve as a company police force to suppress all opposition from within the workforce. They are therefore deeply hated by most sections of the workers.

The trade unions accept the capitalist profit system as well as its nation-state framework. They subordinate the working class to the so-called imperative of the international market and conditions of competitiveness. Instead of calling on all airline workers to strike, Ufo turns to management and pleads for more negotiations.

A Ufo statement declared, “It is now in the hands of management to prevent or end further strikes. We are always open to constructive and fair offers or proposals.”



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