

Germany: UFO union calls off strikes and begs for hearing with Lufthansa bosses

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The Independent Flight Attendants Organisation (UFO) has scrubbed the strikes planned for this week at Eurowings. The small sectoral union says it is “speechless” at the tough stance being taken by the Executive Board of the Lufthansa low-cost subsidiary, and has subserviently pleaded for the board of the parent company to act.

When the negotiations, which have been running for about three years, were again broken off last week, the union launched a 24-hour strike last Thursday, largely paralysing Eurowings and Germanwings flights. Nearly 400 of more than 500 flights were cancelled. At the same time, UFO announced it would go on strike for two days this week if there was no movement by the Eurowings board. They apparently did not budge, and yet UFO has bowed to the pressure and cancelled the announced strike.

In a letter to Eurowings workers, UFO wrote that renewed talks with Eurowings representatives had failed on Sunday. “Unfortunately, the talks not only produced no result, they leave us literally speechless.” The Eurowings board holds “the expectation that we will largely drop our demands.”

Nevertheless, “At the end of the evening,” UFO had “taken a step closer to the management,” the union reported. We “have continued to be open to talks about an arbitration settlement.” The management then suggested agreement to a settlement in which the union’s demands would be discussed by the arbitrator—although they have been on the table for almost three years. “But in the end, they did not even want to stand by their own proposal,” UFO informed its members. “We currently do not know what conclusions we should draw from this behaviour.”

Since further discussions at this level appeared meaningless, at least at the moment, UFO said, they

had written a letter to the executive board of the Lufthansa parent company. At the end of the evening, Eurowings management had therefore announced “that a written proposal from them would follow on how to proceed.” But, UFO complained, “Even before we had the opportunity to submit such an offer, false and one-sided information was given to the press immediately following the end of the talks.” Such behaviour only poured more oil on the fire.

UFO, which regards itself as an alternative to the larger service and public sector union Verdi, complained that its willingness to compromise and undertake partnership working with the company board was not being recognized. “From the beginning, we have welcomed and supported the Eurowings concept—always with the goal of bringing EW [Eurowings] forward as a company, and at the same time, protecting the employees’ collective agreement.”

While this practice obviously has not been rewarded, UFO accepted the proposal of the executive board to try and find a solution as part of an arbitration settlement to end the escalation of recent weeks. The union stated: “We therefore offer the executive board, under the direction of Matthias Platzeck along with those responsible, to try and reach an agreement on how to proceed. Such an attempt can seriously succeed, in our opinion, since the previously announced strikes for this week will not now take place.”

This submissive approach is taken even further in the open letter from UFO to Lufthansa. “Since the Cabin Agenda, we have gone on a long, sometimes difficult path with you in supporting your Eurowings strategy,” writes the UFO leader Alexander Behrens and his deputy Sylvia De la Cruz. “In contrast to other trade unions, we still believe that this offers an opportunity to successfully survive in the marketplace,” UFO writes

about the airline's low-cost concept, with which the wages, pensions and working conditions of all 120,000 Lufthansa employees are to be progressively eroded.

Now the "previous common understanding" was being placed in question. "We have the impression that we are being forced into an 'anti-Eurowings stance' that does not do justice to our view of things and our previous approach."

UFO then recalled that it had signed many papers, "among others, in terms of improving our social partnership." UFO and the Lufthansa Executive Board should evaluate "why we did not manage to turn this into better cooperation."

For this reason, UFO again offers "to conduct talks with you and other competent representatives headed by Matthias Platzeck, to restart the whole process, which we very much want to continue to support in an open and constructive way, and also to make more labour disputes obsolete." To this end, they stand ready at any time.

Rarely has a union sent such a submissive letter to a company. UFO published it on their web site. It is a declaration of the bankruptcy of the trade union conceptions, according to which the interests of the capitalists can be reconciled with those of the workforce within the framework of the "social partnership" called for by UFO.

The UFO officials know very well that Lufthansa, with its Eurowings cheap flights strategy, is attacking the pay and conditions of all workers. And that Lufthansa is thus responding to the international competition in the aviation industry, which is relentlessly being fought out on the backs of the workers. They support these goals; and for this reason, they evoke the partnership with the executive board.

But the interests of the shareholders, which the board are obliged to defend, are incompatible with the interests of the workers under the conditions of global competition. UFO is calling for a "neutral" arbitrator to enforce the demands of the board against the workers and to cover up its own role.

The only way to stop the attacks by Lufthansa is to pursue an international socialist perspective. The legitimate demands of the workers, who suffer increasing demands and declining wages at all airlines, must no longer be subordinated to the profit interests of the shareholders. If the international competitive

struggle under capitalism means that only those companies survive that exploit their workers through starvation wages and miserable working conditions, this is a further argument against the capitalist market economy and shows how urgent the need is for a socialist perspective.

The entire aviation industry must be transferred into public ownership, under the democratic control of the working class. To realise this goal, future industrial action must not only be extended to all Lufthansa employees, but ultimately to all airlines worldwide.



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