

# Striking Lufthansa pilots demonstrate in Frankfurt

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Hundreds of Lufthansa pilots demonstrated Wednesday at Frankfurt airport in Germany. Since pilots started their latest strike last week, the company has grounded some 4,500 flights. It is the latest in a series of strikes and protests going back to 2014.

*World Socialist Web Site* supporters distributed copies of a statement raising the political issues in the pilots' struggle to strikers and passers-by. A number of strikers stopped to speak to the WSWs about the issues raised in their dispute.

"Believe me: the glamour factor is no longer there. Everything has changed enormously," Christopher Heim, Lufthansa flight captain, told the WSWs. Hundreds of striking Lufthansa pilots had gathered in front of gate 21 at Rhein-Main Airport in Frankfurt on this icy-cold November morning.

In their 14th strike since 2014, pilots are demanding a salary increase of 3.66 percent per annum. The last wage increase they received was at the beginning of 2012. Much more is at stake, however. The pilots are opposed to the all-round offensive being carried out by the Lufthansa executive under Carsten Spohr, on wages, working conditions and social gains.

Much has changed over the past five years, Christopher Heim (who works on the group tariff committee) explained. This was especially true for the young pilots: "In the past, those seeking work with Lufthansa received a loan from the company for their training. Now everything has been reversed: the school still bears the name Lufthansa, but operates on a completely self-sufficient basis. The young colleagues trained there must put forward a loan of about €100,000, from a bank of course, when their parents cannot provide one with their house as ante. Then it is up to Lufthansa to decide—who do we want to take at the end? The choice then falls on those who are

friendly, who categorically refuse to cooperate with a union or state their opinions too loudly. They are then accepted."

"If they are lucky," Heim continued, "they are hired by the Lufthansa parent company and receive a reasonable salary, that's true. Our management, however, wants to change that and is resolutely moving towards Eurowings [the Lufthansa cheap fare airline, where the salaries are about 40 percent lower]. They threaten colleagues with dismissal and put them under pressure: Accept these conditions or you have no work. And anyone who has a bank breathing down their neck, demanding payment, will accept everything. We have next generation flight leaders who can be out of a job in a moment and then remain unemployed for five years."

"I've been flying for 30 years," Heim adds. "And I love this profession, I would not have wanted any another. But if you still think pilots have a great life, then try flying to New York, into a time zone minus six hours, try to sleep in just 24 hours and then fly safely back home."

A little later, the pilots moved on to Lufthansa's group headquarters in a kilometer-long demonstration. Other Lufthansa employees, including flight stewards and ground service personnel, joined them. "We are in solidarity with our pilots." Anne, a flight attendant, said, "In my opinion, solidarity is not dependent on one's salary scale."

Meanwhile, taking up the position of management, the small professional union Vereinigung Boden (ground personnel union) called for a demonstration opposing the strike. A small group of protesters stood on the road as pilots passed by on their way to Lufthansa headquarters, with placards that read, "End the strike, conciliation now."

According to the website [Airlines.de](http://Airlines.de), nine out of the

34 members of the Lufthansa works council agreed with this strikebreaking. Ground personnel include cargo, technology and catering services. At the last moment, Germany's biggest service union, Verdi, publicly dissociated itself from the strikebreaking action.

Many airport workers reacted with disgust to the call for strikebreaking, which was anonymously sent to the press in the name of "ground personnel" and widely featured in media coverage.

"Pilots earn a good salary but their struggle is admirable," said Sadir from Firma Handling Counts, a wholly owned subsidiary of Lufthansa Cargo. For their part, Fraport AG's apron controllers recalled their own strike of 2012. At that time, the Verdi works councils had lined up with the Fraport management against the workers. One controller remarked: "In order to crush us, the media and the Verdi works councils made common cause with the employers, industry chiefs and the judges."

The current strike by pilots is part of a broad struggle of Lufthansa employees against the company offensive. The anonymous appeal for strikebreaking, which calls for "constructively accompanying the necessary group conversion in the sense of all Lufthansa flights", and "adapting tariff requirements ... to the real market conditions", not only isolates the striking pilots, but also stabs workers on the ground in the back.

Lufthansa's cargo unit, Lufthansa Cargo, intends to cut 800 jobs worldwide. The planned savings of 40 million annually as part of the company's C40 program have already doubled to an annual eighty million. Of this, 55 million are to be saved via cuts in internal personnel and 25 million via service costs. At Lufthansa's catering business LSG Sky chefs 1,700 out of 5,500 jobs are to be axed, although a job guarantee contract is still in force and due to run to 2020. The Verdi trade union had imposed this contract on workers in exchange for so-called "voluntary" wage cuts.

Lufthansa Technic also plans to cut 1,300 jobs in collaboration with Verdi and the works council. The Lufthansa technicians demonstrated just last week in Hamburg against wage dumping. Prior to this, the company had annulled its "collective bargaining protection", which had provided Lufthansa employees with protection against redundancies for the past 36 years.

Meanwhile, the reporting by the corporate media on the pilot demonstration could hardly be surpassed for its hostility to the strikers. Leading the pack was *Bild*, which ran the title: "Pilot demonstration at Lufthansa - this is where greedy pilots are striking. Instead of flying, pilots demonstrated at Frankfurt Airport today. "The pilots are fiercely determined when it comes to destroying the reputation of the largest European airline with strikes," *Bild* writes.



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