

Eurowings pilots in Germany go on 24-hour strike

Marianne Arens
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Pilots employed by the Lufthansa subsidiary Eurowings went on a 24-hour strike on October 6. A large proportion of the airline's approximately 500 flights planned for that day had to be grounded, with more than 30,000 passengers affected.

Well over 300 flights had to be cancelled. According to the individual airports, 118 flights were cancelled at Eurowings' main base in Düsseldorf, 61 in Cologne/Bonn, 72 in Hamburg and 64 in Stuttgart. For its part, Eurowings claimed it had salvaged "half" of the planned flights. For some of the long-haul routes, the airline used aircraft from the non-striking Austrian subsidiary, Eurowings Europe, and partner companies.

In August, a ballot among Eurowings pilots produced a result of 97.7 percent in favour of strike action, based on 90 percent participation.

The pilots are primarily fighting against the scandalous and dangerous permanent overload of work due to staff shortages. "The workload has increased considerably," read a press release from the Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) pilots union, which called for the strike action. "The employer regularly extends the working hours of colleagues to the maximum permitted." Eurowings has been rejecting a new contract with shorter deployment times and additional days off for months.

Pilots also need adequate financial compensation for the losses due to inflation and the losses they had suffered during the coronavirus pandemic through short-time working and lost wages. During the pandemic, the airport unions, including Vereinigung Cockpit, agreed to the suspension of contractually agreed wages, the waiving of additional wage payments and massive job cuts. The Lufthansa subsidiary Germanwings was wound up. Under pressure, Lufthansa pilots alone sacrificed around €800 million.

Although Lufthansa has long since recovered the losses it made during the pandemic—with the help of a

substantial government bailout—the company has not reimbursed the sums extorted during the pandemic, and its pilots continue to work under heavy pressure. This explains their current anger and willingness to strike. It coincides with a growing wave of industrial action throughout the aviation sector.

At the Rhein Main Airport, across Europe and around the world, air traffic strikes have been occurring repeatedly in recent weeks. To give just a few examples: In July, Lufthansa ground staff stopped work, while Ryanair crews held several 24-hour strikes across Europe, especially in Spain. On September 2, 5,000 Lufthansa and Lufthansa Cargo pilots went on strike. In Hanover, Swissport Cargo workers went on strike on the same day. Shortly afterwards, an air traffic controllers strike in France affected the whole of Europe. Currently, air traffic controllers are on strike in 18 African countries, including Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast.

If pilots, cabin crews, ground workers and technicians at airports coordinated their struggles, they would unleash an enormous social power. All the more so because railway workers, dockers, bus drivers, teachers and health care workers are also angry and ready to strike, not to mention auto, metal and electrical workers. In addition, 7 million workers in Germany alone are involved in official wage struggles this autumn and winter.

Around the world, a wave of working class strikes and protests against inequality and exploitation is developing. After three years of the pandemic, increasing numbers of workers are taking up the fight against inflation, hunger and the threat of a third world war.

In all of these developments, however, workers confront the trade unions, which isolate and sell out these struggles due to their totally nationalist and pro-capitalist policies. This is true not only of mainstream unions like Verdi (public service) and IG Metall (metal and electrical industries) but also the smaller, specialist unions

abundantly represented at airports, UFO (flight attendants), IGL (cabin crew) and the Vereinigung Cockpit (VC).

VC is a prime example of this policy of the unions. The pilots union is doing everything in its power to prevent a joint struggle that could really make a difference. It has lined up with the opposing side, with German business interests, the government and the Lufthansa Group, which it supports in the global trade war. In order not to harm the interests of the German-based company and its shareholders, the union strives to prevent any type of joint industrial action. VC not only separates the pilots' struggle from that of flight attendants and ground staff but even refuses to unite the separate industrial actions carried out by Lufthansa and Eurowings pilots.

VC called off an already decided, second strike by Lufthansa pilots in September at very short notice, although at that time it was clear that Eurowings pilots in the same company were prepared to strike. Instead, the union agreed to a shabby deal with the company executive which failed to resolve any of the pilots' problems. The same can now be expected for Eurowings pilots and the employees of other Lufthansa subsidiaries. The readiness of VC to put the interests of shareholders above those of employees has already been demonstrated by the union in the pandemic when it agreed to cut wages and jobs.

If pilots want to succeed, they must free themselves from the straitjacket of the unions and build action committees that act independently of VC and network internationally. The Socialist Equality Party and its affiliated parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International have created the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) for this purpose.

Get in touch with us and register to build action committees!



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