

Pilots at German airline Eurowings on strike for three days

Marianne Arens
19 October 2022

Pilots at Eurowings, a subsidiary of German airline Lufthansa, took strike action once again this week. Their strike lasted three full days, from Monday 12:00 a.m. to Wednesday October 19 at 11:59 p.m. The majority of Eurowings planes were grounded throughout the strike. More than 20,000 passengers were affected each day.

On Monday, about 260 Eurowings flights were cancelled, including 100 out of 176 in Düsseldorf and 42 out of 76 in Cologne/Bonn. A further 25 to 40 flights were cancelled in Stuttgart, Hamburg and Berlin. Based on information from Düsseldorf Airport, the newspaper *Der Westen* reported that out of a total of 443 flights operated by the airline, only 191 took place on Monday, 160 on Tuesday and 159 on Wednesday.

The latest strike was over the terms of the collective agreement, with high workloads for pilots being the major issue. The company schedules pilots “regularly up to the legal limits,” according to the trade union Vereinigung Cockpit (VC), which called the strike. VC called for a reduction of the maximum flight duty period and an extension of the rest period between flights or more rest days for pilots.

The high level of support for the strike underscores how urgent these issues are for pilots: The initial vote at the end of August resulted in 97.7 percent approval for a strike. A first 24-hour strike on October 6, was fully observed.

The ever-increasing burden on flight crews is indeed an explosive issue affecting aviation safety across the board. The flight crew bears primary responsibility for flight safety.

As a result of the corporate greed and shareholder demands for profit, pressure on the pilots is constantly increasing. Since the drastic job cuts during the COVID-19 pandemic, the workload for the remaining

pilots has increased considerably.

For flight crews, working schedules that push the legal limit are now part of everyday life. This is under conditions where the profession involves long working days and short rest periods from the outset, repeated time changes, climatic differences and the effects of noise, radiation and contaminated cabin air.

Plans are even afoot to reduce the number of crew members in the cockpit to just one person under the pretext of technical progress. Such plans were recently discussed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, where the “economic advantage” of such a model was highlighted. At the same time, the training period for young pilots is constantly being shortened.

The consequences of such an irresponsible policy in aviation were already tragically demonstrated by the Germanwings disaster in 2015. At that time, a mentally ill copilot crashed a fully occupied Germanwings plane into a mountain and killed 150 passengers and crew members. The WWSW drew attention to “a society characterized by increasing occupational stress, economic insecurity, public anxiety, social tensions, state violence and militarism” to explain the context in which such a horrific act could take place.

The Eurowings strike is therefore of great importance and deserves the support of the entire working population.

However, in order to improve airline safety and put health and life above profit, a different strategy than that of VC is needed. Such a struggle must be fought at the airport jointly and under equal conditions. It must also involve co-workers among the cabin crew and on the ground. It requires the establishment of independent rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The fight must not be left to a profession-based

organisation such as the Vereinigung Cockpit. VC has no interest at all in appealing for solidarity from other pilots, let alone other workers at airports and in the airlines, or informing co-workers in other countries.

VC has not organized any rally or demonstration at airports where it would be possible to engage with striking pilots. It conducts its collective bargaining in each individual group separately and isolates them completely from each other. The union rejects demands such as “Equal pay for equal work” from the outset and justifies this with the bureaucratic reference to the fact that there is no collective agreement covering all pilots.

VC strictly restricted a strike at Lufthansa at the beginning of September to the Lufthansa and LH cargo pilots, although the result of the initial vote by Eurowings pilots was already known. In the latest strike, VC led the industrial action at Eurowings Germany alone, completely isolated from Eurowings Europe (EWE) or Eurowings Discover, which belong to the same structure of flight operations within Lufthansa.

There is no shortage of problems at the other Eurowings subsidiaries for pilots to protest about: Eurowings Europe recently changed its registration from Vienna to the tax haven of Malta. As a result, not even the current Austrian employment contracts offer EWE staff any security whatsoever. And at Eurowings Discover, there is no worker representation at all. Both companies serve to cement the division of the workforce and the deterioration of their contracts, rights and working conditions.

Eurowings management and the Lufthansa Executive Board that stands behind it benefit from this fragmentation. They also have an easier time coping with industrial action, since they can rely on personnel from other, non-striking airlines. With the help of EWE and Eurowings Discover, massive strikebreaking operations are organised daily. In addition, management can also fall back on former Germanwings pilots who have been contracted to the company’s own Cockpitpersonal GmbH as temporary workers since their airline was wound up in April 2020.

The strike is an unmistakable sign of the swelling global struggle of the working class against inflation and ever worsening conditions. It coincides with current wage disputes in the metal industry and in the public sector, as well as in France with the strike of the

refinery workers.

Objectively, all these struggles are directed not only against the profit-oriented economy, but also against the governments that impose vicious social attacks in its interests. They are implicitly directed against the current war and its social consequences. That is why it is so important to set up rank-and-file committees at airports immediately.



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