

Two days of pilot strikes at Lufthansa

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Around 5,300 Lufthansa pilots went on a warning strike Thursday morning, including for the first time the pilots of the LH regional subsidiary Cityline.

The Cityline crews refused to work for 24 hours. At Lufthansa, 4,800 pilots from passenger operations and Lufthansa Cargo continued to strike Friday, for a total of 48 hours (March 12-13). For Lufthansa pilots it is about fending off the creeping deterioration of their company pension, while the Cityline pilots are fighting to enforce their wage demands.

The pilots' union Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) announced that due to the Iran war, it would not strike on flights bound for the Middle East in order not to endanger return flights. Flights to Egypt, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Yemen, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are therefore explicitly excluded from the strike.

Participation in the strike is high on all other LH and Cityline flights. As VC announced, 75 percent of the short-haul flights targeted by the strike and more than 70 percent of the affected long-haul connections have been cancelled since Thursday morning. This is significantly higher than the forecast by the group's executive board, which had announced on Thursday morning that Lufthansa would operate 60 percent of all long-haul flights.

On Thursday morning, more than 400 of the total 1,165 planned takeoffs and landings (not only at Lufthansa) were cancelled at Germany's largest airport, Rhine-Main in Frankfurt; in Munich, there were about 230 out of a total of around 800 flights. The figures are thus comparable to the cancellations during the last strike on February 12.

The willingness to strike among the roughly 500 Cityline pilots is particularly strong. As VC announced on February 26, they had voted to strike by a large majority. Ninety-five percent of members had

participated in the ballot, with 99 percent supporting industrial action.

Pilots' anger is directed against the Lufthansa executive board under CEO Carsten Spohr, which has been continually delaying their long-overdue wage increases since August 2025. The salaries of the Cityline crews should long since have been raised in three steps of 3.3 percent each, retroactively to February 1, 2024, January 1, 2025 and January 1, 2026. In total, the Cityline pilots are demanding around 11 percent more pay over the entire term of the agreement, until the end of 2026—a demand that is more than justified given the increased cost of living during this period, especially in the expensive Rhine-Main and Munich regions.

The Lufthansa executive board only wants to agree to the wage increases if the sums are saved elsewhere and has been stalling the Cityline pilots for months. According to Spohr, any increase in labour costs had to be offset by productivity gains or savings in other areas of the collective agreement. This is despite the fact that Lufthansa has recently been able to record significant profits again following the coronavirus crisis years.

In the meantime, the new Lufthansa subsidiary City Airline (which has an almost identical name) is continually being expanded, and it is operating so far without a fixed collectively agreed wage structure. Following the Lufthansa subsidiaries Germanwings, Eurowings and Discover Airlines, City Airline is Lufthansa's newest budget airline and is used to put pressure on wages and conditions at the older companies. Parallel to the expansion of City Airline, 800 jobs in the cockpit and cabin are now threatened at Cityline. Ultimately, the Lufthansa crews are also to be forced into these inferior conditions—or lose their jobs.

For Lufthansa passenger operations and Lufthansa Cargo, meanwhile, the issue is not wages—their collective wage agreement was renegotiated in August

2023 and runs until at least the end of 2026 (with conditions and standards that are still significantly higher than those at Cityline—let alone City Airline). Nevertheless, the pilots of the Lufthansa core company are also fighting against systematic deterioration and social attacks.

For them, the issues are the transitional and company pensions, which are vital for pilots. Only a few of them are able to practice their profession until the statutory retirement age, given constant stress, continuous time differences, climatic changes and permanently varying working hours. For a long time, Lufthansa pilots were able to retire at 55 and received transitional pay and a fixed company pension. But this was already changed in 2017—with the approval of Vereinigung Cockpit!

At that time, the system was switched from a guaranteed company pension to capital market-based models. Since then, Lufthansa no longer pays out fixed pension contributions but only guarantees pilots the level of the employer's contribution to the pension fund. However, due to the low-interest policy, the sums paid out have fallen and are subject to fluctuations on the stock market, with employees themselves bearing the market risk. In addition, Lufthansa has never compensated for the bitter shortfalls from the coronavirus period, when pilots sometimes lost up to 50 percent of their wages.

As the flagship of German business, Lufthansa is attempting to pass the costs of the fierce global trade war onto the workforce. Via Lufthansa Technik as an equipment supplier for the Luftwaffe (Air Force), the corporation is also entangled in the massive German rearmament and war policy. Employees are to bear the costs of trade war, rearmament and ultimately war: in the form of continuous social cuts, mass dismissals and an ever-greater risk to their own lives.

It is more than justified to take up industrial action against this threat, all the more so as the pilots' strike is taking place at the same time as industrial action by colleagues in Belgium and elsewhere who face the same threats. The struggle against these social attacks must be waged jointly on an international basis and linked to the struggle against war. Neither Vereinigung Cockpit, nor the flight attendants' union Ufo, and certainly not Verdi, Lufthansa's in-house union, are prepared to do this.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist

Equality Party), the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) propose building independent rank-and-file action committees in every part of the company with the aim of defending living wages, salaries and pensions, and stopping the war. Such action committees must be democratically controlled directly by the workers themselves, and network across industries and countries. The driving principle must be that the needs and lives of workers and their families stand higher than the profits of the corporations.



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