New strikes at German airline Lufthansa: “We’re seen as nothing but a cost factor”

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A new strike by Lufthansa pilots today and Tuesday demonstrates the flight crew’s strong determination to fight. It is part of the growing mobilisation of the European and international working class.

Already on 10 April, around 19,000 Lufthansa cabin crew members walked out, bringing flight operations to a standstill. On this final day of the Easter holidays, 580 out of a total of 1,350 scheduled flights were cancelled in Frankfurt. In Munich, the figure was over 400; and flights also had to be cancelled or rescheduled in Leipzig/Halle, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Cologne/Bonn, Stuttgart, Hanover and Bremen.

The UFO union (Unabhängige Flugbegleiter Organisation, or Independent Flight Attendant Organization) called on cabin crew at Lufthansa and its subsidiary CityLine to take part in the strike. The strikers had voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action. At Lufthansa, where the aim is to fend off massive cuts in the collective agreement, 94 percent voted in favour of strike action, while at CityLine the figure was as high as 99 percent of members.

At CityLine, the crews are not only faced with the Lufthansa Executive Board and CEO Carsten Spohr continually delaying workers’ long-overdue pay rises, but the airline is also facing liquidation by the end of this year, 800 jobs in the cockpit and cabin crew are under immediate threat.

At the same time, the (almost identically named) newest Lufthansa subsidiary, City Airlines, is being further expanded as a low-cost carrier in order to undermine the wages and conditions of the older airlines. City Airlines, based in Munich, is set to take over the regional and feeder flights previously operated by CityLine, while Discover is to increasingly take over Lufthansa’s long-haul flights.

For years, new airline subsidiaries—Germanwings, CityLine, Discover, CityLine and City Airline—have been established to force employees at the older airlines to accept poorer conditions.

Lufthansa is putting such brutal pressure on its crews that it is even jeopardising the safety of its flights. The aviation portal aero.de reported on this a few months ago under the headline: “Cityline pilots are making more mistakes than usual.” The report, which quotes from an internal memo from CityLine’s flight safety department, states:

> During this period of upheaval, the flight safety department has recorded an increase in “atypical errors” in Cityline cockpits...For several months now, Lufthansa Cityline’s flight safety department has been documenting an increase in pilot errors “which, according to the crew members concerned, are directly linked to high emotional stress resulting from the changes within the company.”...The memo on Cityline highlights incidents that occurred whilst crews were under increased workloads.

Provocatively, in the midst of Friday’s strike, Lufthansa reached a collective agreement for City Airlines with the Verdi union, whose employees had previously been working without any collective agreement. The agreement is set to run for three years, carrying with it also a multi-year strike ban.

The Lufthansa Executive Board has denounced the strikes as “irresponsible”, particularly as the company is currently grappling with a sharp rise in fuel prices as a result of the war in Iran. Jens Ritter of the Lufthansa Airlines Executive Board complained bitterly about the strike on Friday. “We already offer the best conditions in the industry,” claimed Ritter. “Demanding even better working conditions and, on top of that, going on strike at a weekend with Easter return traffic, is completely incomprehensible and unacceptable.”

Ritter had previously commented on the pilots’ demands in an interview: “Our economic capacity simply does not allow for any additional burdens.” Lufthansa “does not have anywhere near the money” for this.

However, Lufthansa is one of the DAX-listed companies that continues to pay out generous dividends while attacking workers’ jobs and conditions. Although the Lufthansa Group has been pursuing a strict restructuring course (“turnaround”) for two years and is currently cutting one in five jobs in administration—around 4,000 posts—it will pay out around a quarter of a billion euros in dividends to its shareholders at the Annual General Meeting on 12 May.

In reality, Lufthansa managed to significantly increase its profits last year. In his “Letter from the Board” in February 2026, CEO Carsten Spohr wrote that profit had risen by 4

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percent to €1.1 billion in the 2025 financial year. “Overall, all our airlines were profitable in the 2025 financial year,” he said.

To ensure this continues, Lufthansa is putting increasing pressure on its cabin and cockpit crew. While Lufthansa workers are not, as is the case with CityLine, under immediate threat of redundancy, they are fighting to prevent massive cuts to the terms of their collective agreements and a constant increase in their workload. Lufthansa has made it harder to plan shifts, shortened notice periods and increased the number of working hours per month.

59-year-old flight attendant Katja T. told state broadcaster Hessischer Rundfunk on Friday: “I do believe that aeroplanes belong in the sky and should be flown, but when working conditions are deteriorating so blatantly—and this really is a catalogue of horrors—then there is no other option. We have to fight back against this.” Her greatest personal frustration, she said, is “the feeling that they are fighting against us. They simply see us as a cost factor.”

The pilots, too, have been strung along by the board for months. They have been fighting for years against the deterioration of their transitional allowances and company pensions, which are vital for pilots. Very few of them are able to continue in the profession until the statutory retirement age, given the incessant time differences, changes in climate and constantly varying working hours. For a long time, Lufthansa pilots aged 55 and over were able to retire with a fixed transitional allowance. This was changed in 2017—with the agreement of the Vereinigung Cockpit union.

Widespread dissatisfaction with the situation is what prompted the VC union to call pilots out on strike this week. This is the third strike this year, following a one-day strike on 12 February and a two-day strike in mid-March. This time, the strike includes pilots from Lufthansa AG and Lufthansa Cargo, as well as CityLine and (on Monday only) Eurowings. There are currently further disputes involving Lufthansa’s ground staff, where 20,000 workers are fighting for their wages and conditions.

The latest pilots’ strike is now the fourth major strike against Lufthansa within ten weeks. These industrial disputes are part of a growing mobilisation of the working class across Europe.

Last weekend, thousands in Ireland protested against high fuel prices; in Corsica, French fishermen brought the port to a standstill, forcing several cruise ships, among others, to turn back; in Belgium, there were strikes in prisons, and, in Lisbon, metro workers brought public transport to a standstill. Mass strikes and protests in Italy, Greece and Spain have taken place against the genocide in Gaza. In the US, new sections of the working class are going on strike one after another: military and civilian Boeing workers, nurses, teachers and car workers, while millions take to the streets against Trump.

However, to prevail in the conflict with the oligarchs and shareholders—who are on a warpath, dictating attacks on workers in the economy—the working class needs a new perspective and leadership capable of rising to the challenge.

The International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on all workers to build a global movement of the working class against war and social attacks. Aviation workers in particular will play a decisive role in this. They are locked in a struggle against global corporations. Not only will they jointly defend their rights, wages and conditions worldwide, but they will also help to stop all weapons for war and genocide, protect immigrants, refugees and migrants from deportation, and unite the working class internationally.

This struggle must be directed not only against the oligarchs and imperialist governments, but also against trade union bureaucracies of all stripes. They essentially represent the interests of the respective national corporations and governments. They divide workers along the lines of workplaces, sectors and nations. Even sectoral unions such as VC or UFO are no exception, let alone the service sector union Verdi, which quite openly colludes with the corporation against the strikers.

The trade unions are not fighting against mass redundancies. Worse still, they are helping to carry out the job cuts. A telling example of this is UFO, which has responded to the winding-up of CityLine merely by demanding a redundancy plan. UFO states as its strike demand: “Conclusion of a collective agreement on a social plan with the contents listed below,” and then lists points in the appendix such as notice periods of up to a maximum of 18 months, severance pay and entitlements in the event of a transfer to another airline.

All of this presupposes the winding up of CityLine. In other words: UFO has accepted the closure.

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