

Lufthansa closes regional carrier CityLine with immediate effect: An act of top-down class war

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On Thursday, April 16, the Lufthansa executive board announced the immediate closure of regional carrier CityLine. In an unprecedented act of top-down class war, it has suspended around 1,300 pilots, stewards and stewardesses, and technical and other personnel with immediate effect.

Last week, the entire personnel of CityLine, around 25,000 employees, had participated in strike actions at Lufthansa Classic, Lufthansa Cargo and Eurowings to defend jobs, working conditions and pensions. In a loud demonstration on Wednesday, well over a thousand strikers marched right up to the corporation's centenary celebration in Frankfurt am Main.

Only one day later, the Lufthansa executive board gave its answer: In an internal communication, it informed CityLine employees that the operation of their airline had been discontinued with immediate effect: "All affected employees in the cockpit and in the cabin will be suspended subject to recall—with a few exceptions."

In an internal video (broadcast in part by Hessenschau), Fabian Schmidt from CityLine management told the workforce that the carrier had not been competitive for a long time. The high unit costs and inefficient operations had led to the company's "clients," namely Lufthansa Classic and Lufthansa Cargo, cancelling their orders.

"Due to these short-term, very significant impacts, we can currently no longer continue flight operations," said Schmidt. "If we are honest: The lack of reliability and operational stability in recent weeks have not helped us." The latter clearly referred to the strikes of the past few days.

The sword of Damocles of the impending winding up had been hanging over CityLine for some time. Previously, it had been said that Cityline would cease operations at the end of 2027. As a reaction to a justified industrial dispute, the closure is a clear declaration of war on its own personnel, comparable to the mass lockouts with which the corporations took action against hundreds of thousands of metalworkers in the 1970s and in 1984 during the struggle for the 35-hour week. For over 40 years, such drastic measures against strikers have rarely never been taken.

Employment lawyer Prof. Peter Wedde from Applied Sciences described the closure of CityLine on Hessenschau as a "bombshell" and a "catastrophe." He expected a further escalation of the industrial dispute.

The step taken by the executive board under Carsten Spohr makes one thing clear above all: The days of "social partnership" between capital and labour are over. This is already shown by the so-called "new era" at Lufthansa, a brutal restructuring strategy that has for some time been accompanied by the founding of new low-cost carriers, the closure of unprofitable airlines and a massive deterioration in conditions for crews. The last doubts about management's intentions have now been dispelled by the abrupt closure of CityLine.

Behind the Lufthansa executive board stand billionaire shareholders such as Kühne Holding, which owns 15.01 percent of Lufthansa. Multimillionaire Karl-Michael Gernandt, a major shareholder of Kühne+Nagel, Hapag-Lloyd and Lufthansa, as well as a member of the Lufthansa supervisory board, personally spoke up in an open letter to demand that the sectoral trade unions UFO (cabin crew) and Cockpit (pilots) immediately break off the strikes, hurling foul abuse at them. Gernandt accused them of "unreliability, egoism and blind industrial action."

The chairman of the supervisory board, Karl-Ludwig Kley, the multimillionaire CEO of pharmaceutical giant Merck, also insulted the striking unions as "destructive" at the ceremony marking Lufthansa's 100th anniversary, demanding Chancellor Merz bring in a new regulation of the right to strike before this "grows into an even greater competitive disadvantage."

Under conditions of trade war, the wars against Iran and Russia and exploding energy costs, German business leaders are determined to pass the entire burden of the crisis, the tariff war and massive rearmament costs onto the working class. Anyone who resists this is insulted as "egoistic" and "irresponsible" and threatened with dismissal or punished.

It is clear that this must not be accepted, as otherwise the floodgates will be opened for even sharper attacks on more and more workers—at the suppliers, subsidiaries and the core brand Lufthansa alike. But workers' jobs, wages and retirement provisions are not negotiable. They take precedence over the profits of the oligarchs, not only in the interests of the workforce and their families, but in passenger safety as well. To defend them today requires the principle of solidarity: "One for all and all for one."

What is necessary is the expansion of the struggle to defend the jobs and working conditions of not only the CityLine crews, but of

all aviation workers. For this, independent rank-and-file committees must be founded that base themselves on socialist and internationalist principles.

The trade unions act not as representatives of workers' interests, but of the company's. Above all, service trade union Verdi has openly proven itself to be a Lufthansa company union. Right in the middle of the strike by CityLine pilots and flight attendants, Verdi agreed on a collective agreement with Lufthansa for Lufthansa City Airlines, the new low-cost brand that is to take over CityLine flights. Conditions under the new contract are worse than at CityLine and in addition, Verdi has agreed to a three-year term, tantamount of a strike ban until 2029.

But the sectoral trade unions UFO and Cockpit (VC), with whom the Lufthansa executive board has fallen out, are also not prepared to wage a principled industrial struggle for every job. At CityLine, they accepted the closure long ago and limited their demands to negotiations over a "social plan."

UFO had downright begged the executive board to enter into social plan negotiations. UFO representatives were then taken by surprise by the bringing forward of the closure. UFO chief negotiator Harry Jäger reacted with bewilderment to the news, saying he was "horrified and shocked." "None of us expected this level of ruthlessness. This is open war against their own people," he said.

In their reply to the open letter with which the Kühne Holding intervened, UFO representatives reaffirmed that they wanted to hold onto the social partnership: "UFO reaffirms its willingness for a constructive dialogue in the sense of a functioning social partnership."

The UFO board has published a statement on the closure of CityLine, in which it assures CityLine employees: "We see you. And we deeply regret what you are being subjected to here." An example was being made of CityLine, it continues. The impression arose "that this escalation did not just develop yesterday, but had been prepared and was lying in the drawer for a long time." They asserted they would not accept this "economic absurdity," saying, "Whoever damages such structures without regard for losses not only takes away employees' prospects but also weakens regional connections and smaller airports that are important for the overall system, and thus harms the overall German aviation sector. That is morally questionable and economically short-sighted."

But what is the conclusion of the UFO leaders? They continue to offer themselves to the Lufthansa management as better business economists. Their "message to all colleagues" is: It will not work without UFO, therefore UFO must be supported in the next works council elections. Especially "in the social plan negotiation" it becomes apparent "how important strong personnel representations are. ... This applies more than ever with a view to the upcoming personnel representation elections in all companies."

Not a word about the continuation of the dispute, let alone about an expansion of the industrial action to beat back the executive board's attack. This is the cowardly and convoluted language of bureaucrats who have already capitulated and are only trying to save their positions.

Pilots' union Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) is no better. VC President Andreas Pinheiro had proposed arbitration while the

strike was still ongoing (which the Lufthansa executive board rejected) and promised to accept its result sight unseen.

Yet pilots at Lufthansa, Lufthansa Cargo and CityLine continued the strike on Friday, the fifth day in a row. The strike ballots had already proven the huge willingness to fight: 94 percent in favour at Lufthansa and almost 99 percent at CityLine! In Frankfurt alone, more than 3,000 flights were cancelled this week as a result of the strike.

A coherent industrial struggle is possible. It is now five years since service provider WISAG at Frankfurt Airport dismissed around 230 ground workers and bus drivers and partially withheld their wages, with at least 30 more dismissals being added subsequently. Those sacked were experienced and professional airport workers who had worked at the airport for decades. Verdi did not lift a finger for them and even contributed to their dismissal.

But contrary to what the corporation, Verdi and the works council had expected, the WISAG workers refused to accept the dismissals. Under the motto: "Today it's us—tomorrow you!" they began to organise their resistance together, demonstrating countless times at Frankfurt Airport, in front of company headquarters and the private villa of WISAG boss Wisser, as well as in Wiesbaden in front of the Hesse state parliament. At Terminal 1, they even organised a hunger strike for eight days, and they appeared as a collective at all court hearings.

The WISAG workers were able to reverse some, though not all, dismissals at the time, as they remained essentially isolated back then. But the most important thing their struggle achieved was the understanding that workers must mobilise independently, and that this is possible.

All the institutions of society—the media, the trade unions, the bourgeois parties and also the courts—act as instruments of a narrow layer of super-rich capitalists who were able to further enrich themselves in the COVID pandemic. Today, they enhance their wealth boundlessly in the various wars. Lufthansa is also involved in the insane military rearmament programme; its subsidiary, Lufthansa Technik, works as a supplier to the air force and profits from it.

The closure of CityLine comes in a situation in which the potential for an effective industrial struggle, including the struggle against war, is constantly growing. The willingness to fight against a system that is heading for catastrophe is also growing among Aldi IT workers, Berlin bus drivers, train drivers, nursing staff, educators and metalworkers.

We call on the employees of CityLine and Lufthansa: Take the struggle into your own hands!



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