



LUFTHANSA UNION THREATENS FURTHER STRIKES

News / Airlines



Lufthansa's main cabin crew union threatened further industrial action on Friday as workers protested at Frankfurt airport at the end of a week-long strike which grounded most of the airline's flights.

"This strike will end tonight, but if management doesn't change, then strikes will be possible again at any time," Nicoley Baublies, head of the union, told staff.

Relations between the two sides have become increasingly bitter in the negotiations over early retirement benefits and pensions, which have dragged on for two years.

A big sticking point in the negotiations is that Lufthansa wants to introduce a cheaper early retirement and pension scheme for new employees, while the union wants the same deal for both current and future staff.

Since they started strike action last Friday the union has forced the cancellation of about 4,700 Lufthansa flights, disrupting the travel plans of 550,000 passengers. Other group airlines such as Swiss, Austrian and Germanwings were not affected.

"What we've seen is that no matter what you do, you just can't reach a resolution with this management," Baublies said. His comments were echoed by Ilja Schulz, head of the pilots' union that has staged over a dozen strikes in 18 months.

Lufthansa's chief financial officer and head of personnel visited the demonstration in front of the airline's headquarters at the airport, joining Baublies on a small stage to speak to the several hundred workers waving banners, blowing whistles and chanting "We are Lufthansa".

Lufthansa says structural cost cuts are necessary for it to compete in the long term with fast-growing budget carriers in Europe and leaner Gulf rivals in its all-important long-haul markets.

"For us it is clear, the enemy is without, not within. We want to find solutions, and we will find them, but we should make Lufthansa strong together," HR head Bettina Volkens said.

However, chief financial officer Simone Menne gave no indication that there was room for compromise.

"What we have offered is what we can afford," she told the gathering.

She also said that the strikes would not lead to the airline changing its profit forecast for this year.

Last month Lufthansa said it expected to report record profits in 2015, boosted by lower fuel costs and strong demand, but chief executive Carsten Spohr has said its costs are continuing to rise and need to be cut now as competition intensifies.

The company said Spohr could not address the protestors on Friday, as he was away in France at an event to thank volunteers who had helped in the aftermath of the Germanwings crash in March.

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