

Lufthansa prepares to double job cuts to nearly 40,000

By Gustav Kemper
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Lufthansa is considering reducing its current workforce by about 30 percent—or around 40,000 jobs. This is nearly twice as many as the 22,000 job cuts the German airline announced at the end of June. The sale of parts of the company is also imminent, including the catering operation LSG-Sky Chefs and Lufthansa Technik.

According to a report in *Manager-Magazin*, the increase in job cuts was discussed at a closed meeting of the Lufthansa board held at the holiday home of Group CEO Carsten Spohr in Olbia, Sardinia.

During an internal online question and answer session Tuesday, Spohr announced that 28,000 jobs would be cut. Although the airline has received nine billion euros in state aid, the planned reduction of the group's fleet by 100 aircraft together with their respective crews is not sufficient, he said. A decision is to be taken next week after a meeting of the supervisory board, where shareholders sit alongside union officials.

The different unions at the airline have collaborated closely with the board over the past months, seeking to outdo each other with savings proposals, including agreeing to massive wage cuts, job cuts, part-time contracts for older employees and further reductions. Union officials sought to justify their actions by claiming the concessions would “save” jobs. However, the concessions only encouraged Spohr to tighten the screws further.

In June, the cabin crew union, UFO, collaborated with the Lufthansa board on a plan to cut a “surplus of 26,000 jobs.” On Deutschlandfunk radio, UFO executive Daniel Flohr declared that a job cut of that magnitude was not a surprise and was based on “comprehensible calculations.” Lufthansa had been presented with proposals for savings “on a silver

platter,” by the union, Flohr said, and in return, the union had received a promise to “avoid compulsory redundancies.”

UFO accepted wage concessions amounting to more than half a billion euros and allegedly received an assurance of four years' protection against dismissals in return. Now the necessary “renegotiations” are already being discussed, and an industry news service, *aero.de*, reports that the contract can be terminated unilaterally in the case of poor business performance.

Meanwhile, UFO managing director Nicoley Baublies complained that there have been no more talks on the details of the transitional arrangements and severance pay since the contract was signed because the employer had “gone into hiding.” At the LH subsidiaries Germanwings and SunExpress Germany, 1,500 flight attendants are now facing dismissal.

The Verdi trade union, with 35,000 ground worker members at the airline—has offered concessions worth 600 million euros. This was too little, said Lufthansa, which broke off talks saying the concessions represented only an 8 percent reduction in personnel costs, when a 20 percent cut was needed.

After the negotiations broke down, Lufthansa terminated 80 agreements on part-time work for older employees at the Düsseldorf, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Hanover, Cologne, Nuremberg and Stuttgart sites. Mira Neumaier, who is conducting the negotiations for Verdi, described the terminations as “morally subterranean.”

The pilots' union Vereinigung Cockpit offered a 45 percent cut in salaries, which, with some 5,000 pilots, amounts to savings of €350 million.

The concessions made by the unions have also encouraged Lufthansa to escalate its attacks on the working conditions of flight crews.

The company is setting up a new business unit called “Ocean” to compete in long-haul flights to tourist destinations because the number of passengers in the “quality leisure segment” is growing faster than those of business flights due to the pandemic. Lufthansa is in the process of securing an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) for the new unit, which will not operate under its own brand and will compete with the established holiday airlines Condor and Tui.

Ocean is scheduled to start its first flights from Munich and Frankfurt in spring 2021. In line with the Swiss subsidiary Edelweiss, which belongs to the Lufthansa group, employees will be paid far below the level of the Lufthansa collective agreement. Also, the employment contracts will be fixed term.

Until these new crews are recruited, flights will be operated by staff of the SunExpress and Cityline subsidiaries. After that, crews “will then be able to reapply on their own routes at significantly worse conditions and may also only hope for a temporary job,” Markus Wahl, president of the Vereinigung Cockpit (VC), said.

While the unions are collaborating closely with the executive board on job and wage cuts, splitting the workforce into temporary and permanent workers, normal and low-paid workers, and older and younger workers, there is growing anger and a willingness to fight among flight crews. Many employees are looking on social media for a perspective, where discussions are developing.

Aviation workers must break with the bankrupt unions and build independent action committees that unite workers across borders to fight to defend jobs and wages. The crisis in the aviation industry cannot be solved on a capitalist basis. It requires a socialist perspective. The corporations must be expropriated and transformed into democratically controlled public bodies that serve the needs of society, not profit.

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