LUFTHANSA CABIN CREWS SET TO START AIRLINE'S LONGEST STRIKE

News / Airlines



Deutsche Lufthansa AG faces its longest-ever strike after flight attendants rejected the airline's latest offer in a long-running dispute over savings efforts aimed at weathering competition from low-cost rivals such as Ryanair.

Cabin crew are set to halt work Friday afternoon, the UFO labor union said in a statement Thursday, without specifying the exact time or routes and airports that will be affected. The union earlier said the protest would continue through Nov. 13 if an agreement wasn't reached by its deadline.

Lufthansa "didn't present a better offer," Nicoley Baublies, the head of UFO, said in the statement. "There are now no more options to avoid tomorrow's strike."

Lufthansa said it made an improved offer that was turned down. UFO might only announce possible strikes in the course of Friday morning and effects on passengers will be particularly severe due to the short notice, Lufthansa said in an e-mailed statement. The company said it can't adjust flight schedules before a specific announcement by the union. "Lufthansa is making every effort to keep the effects on passengers as little as possible," the airline said in a statement.

Europe's second-largest airline is seeking to curb spending to sustain earnings while competing with European discount airlines and full-service rivals from the Middle East. The flight attendants' dispute mirrors one between Lufthansa and its pilots, whose strikes ended in September after a German court ruled the actions were an illegal protest against company plans to expand a low-cost unit.

The union set a deadline of 5:00 p.m. in Frankfurt to receive a revised proposal from Lufthansa on

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pension benefits, but rejected the alternatives proposed by the company.

Germanwings Unaffected

Lufthansa reiterated flights by its CityLine, Germanwings, Eurowings, Air Dolomiti, Austrian and Swiss units as well as by Brussels Airlines aren't affected by the walkout. The carrier's main airport hubs are in Frankfurt and Munich.

Cabin crews at Lufthansa have only once staged a large-scale walkout when three days of strikes in 2012 cost the carrier EUR33 million (US$39 million) and 1,500 flights were scrapped. That compares with the 352 million euros in costs and 9,700 cancellations that a series of pilot strikes caused since last year.

The 2012 flight attendants' contract dispute was eventually solved through arbitration. This time, UFO said arbitration and other sessions aimed at resolving the conflict failed to produce results. The union threatened in June to walk out for almost three months before returning to the negotiating table.

UFO has agreed to a switch of Lufthansa's pension system to a defined-contribution program from defined benefits. The airline said this week that the union is seeking to maintain payments at previous levels, while Lufthansa wants employees to work additional years to reach that figure.

06 NOVEMBER 2015

SOURCE: BLOOMBERG
ARTICLE LINK:
https://ut.50skyshades.com/news/airlines/lufthansa-cabin-crews-set-to-start-airlines-longest-strike

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