



LUFTHANSA DROPS FLIGHTS AS AIRPORT WORKERS PLAN STRIKE WEDNESDAY

News / Airlines



Deutsche Lufthansa AG and Air Berlin Plc are scrapping more than 900 flights this week as a strike by public-services workers at German airports on Wednesday hobbles operations in Frankfurt, Munich and Cologne.

Lufthansa, Europe's third-biggest airline, is eliminating 895 flights, or 60 percent of the the 1,500 services it had scheduled for Wednesday, the German carrier said Tuesday in a statement. About 87,000 passengers are affected, it said. Discount competitor Air Berlin is dropping 43 domestic flights slated for Munich and Cologne through noon Wednesday and will reroute long-haul flights to Nuremberg.

The Ver.di labor union is organizing walkouts of as long as a day at six airports on Wednesday as part of a wider pay dispute involving German federal and local government employees. Ver.di, which is demanding 6 percent pay raises for 2.1 million public-service workers across the country, is scheduled on Thursday and Friday for the next round of talks with authorities. Other airports affected by the strike include Dusseldorf, Dortmund and Hanover, with stoppages planned by check-in, security and fire-service workers.

While Lufthansa will operate most long-haul services out of Frankfurt on Wednesday, it will drop most German flights and “numerous” European services there, Lufthansa said. At Munich, Lufthansa will scrap all intercontinental services, and only about 90 flights to German or other European destinations will be offered. Customers will be able to rebook seats free of charge, and passengers on intra-German routes can use Deutsche Bahn trains instead, the airline said.

The stoppage coincides with the opening of a 900 million-euro (\$1.02 billion) terminal in Munich on Tuesday that Lufthansa and the airport operator built and operate jointly to increase capacity there by 11 million passengers a year.

“The strike confirms once again the urgent need for certain ‘rules of play’ on industrial action in aviation” that should include requiring binding arbitration or other conciliation procedures before a walkout can proceed, Bettina Volkens, head of personnel at Lufthansa, said in the statement.

Airlines and their employees aren’t part of the wage negotiations because the carriers are private entities. Even so, the flight cancellations are a setback for Lufthansa Chief Executive Officer Carsten Spohr, whose own struggles trying to win cost concessions from pilots and cabin crews resulted in about a 500 million-euro total reduction in operating profit over the past two years due to walkouts. Lufthansa reached a labor agreement with 30,000 ground workers represented by Ver.di in November.

The stoppages are also hurting Air Berlin’s efforts to revive earnings following years of losses. The carrier’s efforts to widen code-sharing agreements with Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways PJSC, its biggest shareholder, have been hampered by regulatory disputes with Germany.

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