

RYANAIR BEATS BERLIN AIRPORT STRIKE BY FLYING IN ITS OWN STAFF

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Striking Berlin airport workers may cease giving notice of walkouts after Ryanair began using its own ground staff to help to maintain services from the German capital.

The tactic of bringing in foreign "strikebreakers" poses a security threat because the Ryanair employees are being granted so-called air-side access without sufficient checks, the Ver.di union said on Tuesday.

The labour group, which represents about 2,000 striking staff at six ground-handling providers, may now deviate from its practice of announcing each walkout a day in advance to give people time to change their travel plans.

Ryanair said it had brought in only "fully qualified and authorised ground-handling staff" to dispatch aircraft and minimise disruption to customers. Kenny Jacobs, the carrier's chief marketing officer, added that strikers "have no business" accessing the airport and ramp when they are not working.

"It's a disgrace that Berlin customers and visitors are having their travel plans disrupted," Mr Jacobs said. "We call on the German government to intervene."

Flights from Berlin's Tegel and Schoenefeld airports are being disrupted for a third day in five as workers seek improvements in pay that has been squeezed by increased competition. Some 578 flights were cancelled, taking the total lost since the walkouts began on Friday to more than 1,900.

Some other airlines are also managing to operate flights, and while that may be with Berlin-based staff or non-striking handlers, Ryanair said it is not alone in drafting in help.

Europe's biggest low-cost carrier serves Schoenefeld alongside discount rivals including easyJet and Norwegian Air Shuttle. Tegel's leading operators are airberlin, Lufthansa and British Airways.

Ver.di said that the current strike will end at 5am on Wednesday. While the union did not directly respond to an offer from the employers to enter mediation, it said a sweetened pay deal must be proposed to stave off further action. Although an agreement has been reached at Stuttgart airport, the conflict could spread to Frankfurt, where Acciona has yet to agree terms, it said.

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