

Air Canada pilots strike

3 September 1998

Air Canada's 2,100 pilots launched their first-ever company-wide strike midnight Tuesday, forcing Canada's largest air carrier to cancel all its flights Wednesday and today.

At this time of year, Air Canada has some 600 flights a day carrying upwards of 60,000 passengers.

The strike began shortly after negotiations between the Air Canada Pilots Association and Air Canada collapsed. The two sides had reportedly reached agreement on safety, working conditions and job security, leaving wages the only outstanding issue.

The pilots have been pressing for a significant wage increase to bring the pay scale at Air Canada more in line with the North American norm. Pilots at the major US airlines make between 30 and 50 percent more than their counterparts at Air Canada, although 70 percent of Air Canada's flights are to or from foreign--i.e., mainly US--destinations.

The Pilots Association had been demanding a 20 percent pay increase over two years, but scaled back its demand to 12 percent as the midnight Tuesday strike deadline approached. Air Canada, which last year made \$427 million in profits, has offered an increase of just 9 percent over two years.

Citing safety concerns, the pilots have also been pressing for Air Canada to hire more pilots so that an extra pilot can be added on long flights and Air Canada pilots' average monthly flying time can be reduced to the industry norm. Neither Air Canada nor the pilots association has revealed how these issues were resolved.

No negotiations are currently scheduled. Air Canada has said that if the strike lasts more than three days it will lay off 16,000 of its other employees.

The strike is the largest since Air Canada was privatized. Last year 900 pilots at Air Canada's four regional carriers--Air BC, Air Ontario, Air Alliance and Air Nova--struck for more than 50 days.

Pilots at United Airlines, which has a corporate

partnership with Air Canada--but not those employed at Air Canada's regional subsidiaries--have promised that they will refuse to fly any additional flights added to accommodate Air Canada passengers.

Meanwhile, in the United States 6,150 Northwest Airlines pilots are entering their sixth day on strike. The Clinton administration is pressing the two sides to resume negotiations that broke down last weekend. On Wednesday Northwest laid off 27,500 mechanics, flight attendants, customer service employees and other ground workers due to the strike.

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