

Settlement reported near in Air Canada strike

Lee Parsons
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Striking Air Canada pilots picketing at the Toronto airport

Negotiators for Air Canada

and its pilots union said that an agreement to end the nine-day strike by 2,100 pilots was near Thursday afternoon. Bargaining sessions, which have been described as 'intense,' had been going on for more than 25 hours at a Montreal hotel, when bargainers announced that a deal would be reached 'within hours.'

Formal negotiations between the Air Canada Pilots Association (ACPA) and the company resumed Tuesday, after talks had broken down. A news blackout has prevented any details from being revealed, however pilot union negotiators indicated their willingness to retreat from their demand for a 12 percent wage increase over the next two years.

If a deal is reached it will have to be ratified by the membership and flights will not resume until next week at the earliest. Last weekend Air Canada laid off 9,500 non-striking employees, including baggage handlers, ground crew and flight attendants.

Although the airline recorded \$427 million in profits last year, management has insisted it cannot afford to close the wages gap between Canadian pilots and their international counterparts. Canadian pilots earn an average of US\$66,000 a year, some 30 percent less than pilots who fly for the US and European carriers involved in international alliances with Air Canada.

Air Canada has reported losing \$10 to \$13 million a day due to the strike. While the pilots initially asked for a 12 percent pay raise over two years, the company's latest offer was 9 percent. ACPA maintains that while they are seeking wage parity with pilots in the US and Europe there are many other issues to be dealt with,

such as safety, job security and scheduling.

The WSWs spoke to an ACPA spokesman on the picket line at the Toronto airport. Captain Darryl Gunn said, 'The Air Canada pilots are adamant right now in standing their ground to obtain a fair and equitable contract for all members. In the past the union, in cooperation with Air Canada, made major concessions in terms of work hours and rates of pay. We did this to help Air Canada return to profitability.

'Now the corporation is making record profits. Their annual report thanked the employee groups, including the pilots, for their contribution. We feel that it's simply a matter of negotiating a contract that would bring us back up to the point that we were advancing to before. There's a lot of controversy about parity between Canadian and American carriers or European carriers around the world. That kind of parity certainly wouldn't be expected in one contract negotiation. But we want to close the gap and start moving forward in compensation by negotiating a settlement that would be better for our membership.

'We're certainly not declaring publicly that the airline industry and air travel is unsafe. What we are saying, though, is that airline management and companies are under great pressure today to control costs by the shareholders. We are very much cognizant of the fact that those particular costs can affect the margins of safety and so we're analyzing that very closely.

'One area that is a major concern to pilots around the world is providing relief pilots. We have longer flights, airlines are flying in new, different markets, and of course the airline pilot is concerned about making sure that we have flight crews that are alert and have adequate rest, particularly in long haul flights that involve traveling perhaps halfway around the world.

'A well-known author and airline captain has been speculating on the effects of deregulation over the last 15 years. A lot of these projections are coming true and

need to be addressed and monitored. Safety is paramount and it's a responsibility we take very seriously. We would be irresponsible if we did not analyze and monitor events in this competitive global environment. I mean, what price tag can you put on a human life?'

See Also:

The Northwest, Air Canada strikes and the globalization of the airline industry

[4 September 1998]

Air Canada pilots strike

[3 September 1998]



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