

# American Airlines pilots continue "sick-out"

David Walsh  
12 February 1999

Pilots at American Airlines in the US apparently defied a federal court order Thursday and remained off the job in large numbers. Nearly 1,100 American flights had to be canceled, more than the 900 scratched the day before when some 2,400 of the giant airline's 9,300 pilots called in sick. US District Court Judge Joe Kendall in Dallas, Texas ordered the pilots to end their "sick-out" Wednesday and return to work. American Airlines went back to court Thursday asking that the pilots union be held in contempt.

While the company indicated Thursday afternoon that it could not determine how many flights were canceled due to sick calls and which resulted from scheduling difficulties due to the previous days' actions, pilots interviewed by the media expressed their determination to proceed with the sick-out. One pilot told a television reporter that he would not get well until the issues involved in the dispute were resolved. Capt. Neil Ekblaw told the Associated Press, "It doesn't surprise me that we are having more trouble. As long as AMR [American's parent company] management uses this confrontational approach it is not likely to get better."

One unnamed official of the Allied Pilots Association (APA) told a *Dallas Morning News* reporter, following the issuance of the court order, that he didn't know whether the pilots would show up for work Thursday. "Yes, we will respect the TRO [temporary restraining order]. But whether it will motivate the guys to clear out the sick list, I just don't know." Another official commented, "My prediction: Court order or not, the numbers [of those out sick] will not go down." During a previous pilot sick-out against American in 1990, many pilots failed to return to work despite a court order. Last year Trans World Airlines flight attendants similarly defied a federal judge and stayed "sick."

American was obliged to cancel at least 30 flights Thursday at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, American's home base, and about 25 percent of its

morning flights from O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. At New York City's LaGuardia Airport the airline canceled about a third of its flights, along with 33 of 35 departing flights from New York's JFK International Airport, most of them to Latin America.

It was unclear immediately how many of the cancellations were the result of defiance of the court order because the pilots are scheduled for three or four days at a time, so that absences due to Wednesday's sick-out will continue to affect the airline for several days. The previous actions have also caused pilots and aircraft to be out of position, making it time-consuming to return the schedule to normal.

The dispute centers around American Airlines' efforts to circumvent its contract with the pilots and continue paying pilots at Reno Air, a recent acquisition, approximately half what their counterparts at American receive. Reno, a Nevada-based carrier, operates 27 McDonnell-Douglas narrow-body aircraft with 297 pilots. The APA's contract with American contains a Scope Clause, which provides that all flying performed for the airline or an affiliate "shall be performed by pilots on the American Airlines Pilots Seniority List in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Agreement." According to the APA, the company has unilaterally broken the agreement by insisting that it be given 18 months to integrate the Reno pilots. The company claims that increasing the Reno pilots salaries' to American levels would cost them too much money.

Pilots are angry at years of concerted efforts by American to establish "alter-ego" airlines, undermining job security and living standards. In 1992 American began pulling out of a number of West Coast markets and furloughed more than 600 pilots. At the same time, Reno stepped in and began operating along the same routes American pilots had previously been flying. American, according to the APA, "proceeded to subsidize Reno Air in a number of ways, including

supplying the airline with management services and awarding American AAdvantage miles to Reno Air passengers."

The union claims that its refusal to accept the "airline-within-an-airline" concept during 1997 contract negotiations has led to the current effort to establish a two-tier wage scale at American.

The pilots launched a full-scale strike in February 1997 that was blocked by President Clinton; a settlement was imposed on the pilots, further embittering them. Judge Kendall, in issuing the return to work order, noted, "If you look up the term 'bad labor relations' in the dictionary, you'd see an American Airlines logo besides it."



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**