

United Airlines, pilots union reach deal

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United Airlines management and negotiators for the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) reached a tentative agreement Saturday after months of protests by pilots against the slow pace of negotiations. Neither the airlines nor management have released any details of the deal, which must be approved by the union's executive board meeting September 6-8 before being taken to United's 10,500 pilots for ratification.

Federal and state officials have been pressuring negotiators for an agreement in recent weeks after United, the world's largest airline, was forced to cancel hundreds of flights because many pilots refused to fly more than their regular number of monthly hours. The protest, along with bad weather, made nearly 70 percent of flights late on some days over the last two months. The union disassociated itself from the protest, and it is not clear whether pilots will continue the overtime ban until a new contract is ratified.

Pilots are concerned over two main issues: pay and job security. In 1994 ALPA granted the company hundreds of millions of dollars in wage concessions in exchange for seats on the board of directors. The six-year contract was signed when United and other airlines faced economic difficulties. Pilots are anxious to recoup their losses as the company and the industry as a whole are making record profits. Earlier this year, United acquired US Airways in a \$11.6 billion deal.

United pilots are also concerned about the loss of jobs and promotion opportunities when US Airways pilots are incorporated into the company's seniority list. The ALPA leadership said it was seeking a lifetime guarantee of pilots' earnings no matter what changes occurred at the airline.

Contract talks are continuing with the machinists union. Since the expiration of the contract covering 15,000 mechanics many have also refused to work voluntary overtime. Last week United management withdrew its imposition of mandatory overtime on

mechanics at six airports following discussions with the International Association of Machinists (IAM).

Unlike the pilots, who can refuse overtime after fulfilling their flying quotas, the IAM contract allows the company to impose "operational emergencies" under which the company can demand mandatory overtime and issue severe sanctions against workers who do not conform to overtime schedules. The recent call for mandatory overtime under an "operational emergency" brought resistance by many mechanics who refused to abide by management's requests. In talks between the union and company last week United evidently agreed with the union that a number of the requests for overtime did not fall within the parameters of an operational emergency. The IAM has indicated that it will pursue grievances on behalf of some of those disciplined for refusing overtime.

The IAM officials do not want rank and file workers aroused to the point that it upsets the present negotiations with the company. "We're hopeful that this doesn't interfere with negotiations at all because obviously that's a priority of ours," declared IAM spokesman Frank Larkin.

A major source of the conflicts in the airline industry is the steady increase in air travel under conditions in which the corporate owners with the cooperation of unions have slashed thousands of jobs and increased workloads. The number of airline passengers is expected to reach 670 million this year—an increase of 20 million from 1999. Moreover, the airlines are flush with cash and workers are pressing for improved wages and benefits now, before a downturn in the economy or further restructuring in the industry imperils their jobs.



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