

Irish airline Air Lingus sacks hundreds of workers

Our correspondent
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On Tuesday Republic of Ireland airline Aer Lingus announced 670 job cuts in a major attack on its workforce. It will also close its aircraft maintenance facility in Shannon by the end of the year with the loss of 70 jobs.

As part of an £88 million cost-cutting exercise, 230 cabin crew organized by the Impact trade union face the threat of compulsory redundancy after they rejected the restructuring plans by a margin of two to one. Aer Lingus employs about 1,200 cabin crew and has given the 230 workers 30 days' notice of their sacking.

Aer Lingus described its attack on pilots as a “de-layering” of the cabin crew system. It said that most of the cabin crew could be offered a new job, provided they accept inferior contracts including pay cuts, longer hours and new work practices. According to reports, annual working hours are to increase from 600 to 850 under the new contracts. All 1,200 Aer Lingus cabin crew in the Republic of Ireland are to be sent notices of termination of their employment next month and offered the new contracts.

Another 440 jobs including pilots, administrators, ground staff and craft workers are to go on a “voluntary” basis with the agreement of other unions—SIPTU, Unite and the Irish Airline Pilots' Association. Under the terms of the sell-out agreed to by the bureaucracy, those workers made redundant will receive the minimum payment allowed under legislation. This equates to just six weeks' pay for every year served. The remaining staff will be forced to sign new contracts on reduced salaries and agree to increased productivity.

The airline said this week said that it was satisfied with the agreement “given the overwhelming support” of the unions and that it no longer required the implementation of the 1,065 redundancies outlined in

its “Plan B”.

Impact has refused to demand a united offensive by all workers under attack and has instead called on the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) to reconvene talks. Aer Lingus rejected this proposal this week, stating that several months of talks at the LRC had failed to reach a settlement. Impact has now resorted to pleading with the company to continue working with it on the basis that “Cabin crew workers have proved themselves, over successive cost saving programmes since 2001, to be a loyal and understanding group of workers.”

The union announced in a statement Wednesday that a negotiated settlement with it would be “the best opportunity to secure the airline's long term future.”

Impact cited its role in enabling the company to impose previous cost cutting and attacks on its members' working conditions. It stated that the latest cuts take place only a year after Impact “had agreed to substantial cost saving measures, then valued by Aer Lingus at €15 million. This had followed €8 million worth of savings agreed in 2007, as well as a succession of cost saving deals dating back to September 2001, all of which impacted negatively on earnings and working conditions.”



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