

Nearly 40,000 US airline workers could lose jobs on October 1

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Nearly 40,000 airline workers in the United States face the loss of their jobs on Thursday, Oct. 1, after the temporary prohibition on layoffs included in the \$25 billion government bailout on US airlines expires on Sept. 30. The cuts are part of global massacre of jobs as carriers compete to cut costs and secure market share amid an historic decline in air travel.

The new layoffs include roughly 20,000 jobs at American Airlines, which received \$5.8 billion under the CARES Act, and 16,000 at United Airlines, which got \$5 billion. Delta, which received \$5.4 billion, previously said it would lay off 1,941 pilots in October. Southwest, which got \$3.3 billion, says it will hold off layoffs until the beginning of 2021.

The CARES Act supposedly prohibited permanent job cuts until Oct. 1. After taking the bailout, however, the airlines slashed 100,000 jobs through so-called voluntary leaves of absences, which included deep pay cuts, and early retirement packages. Since March, the airlines have forced 100,000 workers to take furloughs or buyouts, including 20,000 separations at American Airlines, 17,000 at Delta and 4,200 at Southwest.

These furloughed workers could ostensibly be hired sometime in the future, but this could be years down the road or not at all. As one United worker caustically wrote on a page for airline workers, “No layoffs. You’ll just be furloughed for the next 10–20 years.”

The job cuts will have a devastating impact on airline workers and their families across the US, including those who have already suffered deep cuts in wages due to reduction in hours or pay cuts accepted by the unions.

Far from opposing the cuts, the Association of Flight Attendants, the Allied Pilots Association, the Teamsters, the International Association of Machinists and other airline unions have joined corporate

executives in urging Congress to back a second bailout of the airline industry. Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, said they were negotiating with Trump to reach an agreement on another bailout.

“We have heard about the layoffs coming, but we’re only told it’s in the hands of Congress and that the airline executives and the unions are pleading with Congress to pass legislation,” a flight attendant who works for Delta, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “The reality is that United States of America is a corporation, and they don’t care about the people. It’s capitalism, a system that does not meet the workers’ needs,” she said.

The airlines squandered billions of dollars in profits that they accumulated since the financial collapse in 2008–09. Referring to United Airline executives Scott Kirby and Oscar Munoz, one worker said, “With Scott making \$19 million and Oscar the Grouch making \$12 million why don’t they take \$18 million and \$11 million of their salary and give back to the company for operating expenses? Let’s see that happen! Not the American taxpayers’ fault how United runs and when they should have been saving the money they had instead of buying stock back for executive bonuses.”

The airlines have exploited the crisis to accelerate restructuring plans developed well before the pandemic. Lufthansa, which received a \$10.5 billion bailout from the German government, is cutting 22,000 jobs, putting some of its fleet into long-term storage and permanently decommissioning its seven remaining Airbus A340–600s. UK-based Virgin Airlines—which is 49 percent owned by Delta—is cutting 1,150 jobs, bringing its layoffs to 3,550, after receiving a \$1.8 billion rescue package.

Crain’s Business reports that over 350,000 aviation jobs have been cut over the past six months, mostly in

North America and Europe. This includes 220,700 jobs so far at airlines and 60,000 at aircraft manufacturers like Boeing and Airbus. Another 46,500 job cuts have hit airline servicing workers and close to 30,000 at airports. *Crain's* says another 130,000 jobs could be cut, bringing aviation-related job losses to 470,000 or higher by the end of the year.

The major airlines, with the full backing of the unions, have established subsidiaries and regional carriers, which pay lower wages to flight crews, leading to high turnover rates. "We get below poverty wages and flight attendants are disposable like toilet paper," one worker posted on a web site for regional carrier workers.

At the same time, the airlines are pressing to get seats filled on their planes even as the pandemic threatens the lives of crewmembers and passengers alike. Delta flights are presently operating at 60 percent capacity and the planes are sprayed by low-paid cleaners before crews and passengers board, but there is concern about the health impact of the chemicals, the Delta flight attendant told the WWSWS.

"We're not given any information about what is in the spray, and I am fearful that I'll be hearing on the news in six months about the deadly implications of contact with these chemicals," she said. "The cleaners wear masks and gloves but no hazmat suits or even shoe coverings, the spray is in a backpack. If you board the aircraft before the spray dissipates completely, you cough and your throat is sore," she said.



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