

# Delta Air Lines and ALPA reach “agreement in principle” on inadequate three-year deal

Claude Delphian  
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Delta Air Lines has come to an initial “agreement in principle” with the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) union that would give pilots 31 percent in pay raises over the next three years.

Pilots would receive an immediate 18 percent raise upon signing the contract followed by 5 percent the following year and 4 percent each year for the two-year remainder of the contract. One clause promises that Delta pilots would get paid 1 percent more than pilots at rival airlines American Airlines and United Airlines. The tentative deal would result in over \$7.2 billion more that would be spent on pilots’ wages and benefits over the next four years, with 25 percent of that being for “quality of life” improvements.

The agreement fails to restore pilot pay that suffered a large effective reduction under the impact of inflation during the time pilots were working under an expired contract during the pandemic. The proposed wage rises in fact even fall below the current rate of inflation. The promise to pay pilots slightly more than the airline’s competitors is aimed at pilot retention. However, it does nothing to address the pilot shortage, especially at smaller regional airlines, or resolve the hiring and training problems plaguing the airlines.

Talks between US airlines and their pilot unions have dragged on for years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting drop in air travel. Delta pilots voted to authorize a strike in October if an acceptable deal was not reached, although negotiations were extended for over a month while crews were told to stay on the job.

The previous Delta Air Lines contract expired in December 2019, meaning pilots have been working without a contract for three years while prices surged. When the COVID-19 pandemic ramped up and lockdowns slowed air travel to a trickle, the government passed the CARES Act that gave bailouts

to airlines based on the false claim that the money would preserve workers’ jobs and pay. Despite this injection of billions in free cash, airlines began laying off thousands of workers.

Meanwhile, pilots and other airline workers were forced to continue on the job despite the serious risk of infection while inflation and the cost of living soared to nearly 10 percent annual increases. As pandemic restrictions were loosened, then entirely eliminated, air travel demand rapidly increased to strain short-handed air crews with grueling and chaotic schedules.

There is a growing movement among airline pilots and other flight crew against fatigue, overwork and sub-inflation pay raises. In the last two months, 15,000 Delta Air Lines pilots voted by 99 percent to authorize a strike, United Airlines pilots rejected a tentative agreement by a vote of 94 percent and officials in the Allied Pilots Association (APA) at American Airlines voted down a new deal by 15–5. Pilots and flight attendants have been holding informational pickets at major US airports throughout the year, while internationally, flight crews have gone on strike at Eurowings in Germany and Ryanair in Spain.

It is no coincidence that ALPA’s new deal comes just after Congress came together in record time to pass a bipartisan bill to ban strike action and impose a national rail contract which tens of thousands of railroad workers had previously voted to reject. In contrast to how Congress normally endlessly delays and finally kills any bill that would provide any help to workers, Congress quickly enacted legislation to block a strike by railroaders. Democrats, led by Senator Bernie Sanders and three Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) members in the House, included a separate face-saving proposal for seven days of sick leave for workers that was easily defeated in the Senate as

intended.

The ban on a strike by railroaders presents a direct challenge to the right of all workers to oppose management dictates. Dozens, if not hundreds, of workers around the world continue to write to the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Railroad Workers Rank-and-file Committee to express their support for railroad workers.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Delta Air Lines and ALPA quickly seized upon Congressional strikebreaking against railroad workers to try to ram through a pro-company contract on airline workers.

Like railroad workers, pilots should not take this lying down. Rank-and-file railroaders formed the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RWRFC) to respond to these attacks, organizing independently of the pro-company unions that had shown they were in the pockets of the rail carriers.

The RWRFC released a powerful statement last week, saying, “as representatives of rank-and-file rail workers, we declare that, as far as we are concerned, there is no contract, whether Congress passes legislation or not. Congress, one of the most hated institutions in America, has no right to override the democratic rights of workers. If the apparatus of the unions signs these agreements, they do so in violation of the express will of the rank-and-file. Therefore, railroad workers reserve the right to organize and prepare collective action.”

The RWRFC hosted an online rally Tuesday night with hundreds of workers from many different industries around the world in attendance to support rail workers.

Airline workers and pilots need to recognize they are not struggling alone. Workers everywhere are joined in a struggle against exploitation and the tyranny of the ruling class. Pilots can learn from the similar struggles of other workers and form their own rank-and-file committees in order to wage their struggle independently of those antagonistic class forces that would see them demoralized and defeated. Pilots and other airline workers have the power to win every single one of their demands and live their lives with the quality they deserve, but they can only win if they link their struggle to other airlines, industries and workers internationally.



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