

FedEx pilots begin voting to authorize strike action

Claude Delphian
18 April 2023

Are you a Fedex pilot? Tell us how you're voting in the strike ballot and why. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The FedEx Express pilots union began a strike authorization vote on Tuesday, after “setting the stage” for a strike authorization vote almost two months ago. Voting continues until May 17.

Captain Chris Norman, chair of the FedEx Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) Master Executive Council said in a press release: “At a time when our pilots should be joining our company in celebration of its 50th anniversary, we are instead forced to apply additional pressure to management in an effort to secure a new contract. We do not make a decision like this lightly, but we intend to send a strong and unified message to management that our pilots are willing to go the distance to achieve the contract we have earned.”

“We have made progress in many sections of our contract with the remaining items fitting on one term sheet,” said Norman. “Our pilots have significantly contributed to FedEx’s success and allowed it to become a logistics powerhouse, and we are tired of management’s empty platitudes. It’s time for FedEx management to get serious at the bargaining table and conclude negotiations with an agreement our pilots will support.”

ALPA and FedEx have been conducting mediated negotiations under the terms of the infamous Railway Labor Act (RLA) since October 2022, although the negotiations themselves began in May 2021. The RLA forces negotiations through a byzantine series of legally mandated mediation and cool-off periods designed to all but ban strike action.

A strike authorization vote does not require the union to immediately call a strike. Even if a strike is authorized by the membership, a job action is not

inevitable. Under the RLA, the pro-corporate National Mediation Board (NMB) has to first determine that additional mediation would not be productive. The NMB would then offer both parties the opportunity for binding arbitration which undoubtedly would come to a pro-corporate finding.

If either party rejects arbitration, a 30-day “cooling-off” period is forced on both management and the union where no strikes or lockouts can occur. After the “cooling-off” period ends, only then may a job action occur unless the parties return to the table and kick off another cycle of negotiations, mediation, arbitration, cooling off, and ultimately strike prevention. But when the provisions of the RLA were finally exhausted last year on the railroads, setting the stage for a national strike, Congress intervened to impose a deal and ban a strike.

There is growing anger by the 6,000 US FedEx pilots over the stalled contract negotiations while their standards of living are continuously being bombarded by the effects of inflation and rising costs of living.

Airline unions, including ALPA, have a long history of participating in the delay and prevention of strikes, while capitulating to company demands. Last October, Delta pilots voted to authorize a strike by 99 percent after years of stalled negotiations. Despite this authorization to strike, the union extended negotiations for another month while flight crews were ordered to remain on the job without a contract.

After the union bureaucrats successfully delayed strike action, an “agreement in principle” was revealed to Delta pilots including raises below the rate of inflation, effectively pay cuts.

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with a precipitous drop in air travel. Simultaneously, freight and package delivery industries entered a boom

period, including FedEx, as customers shopped online almost exclusively in order to avoid the risk of infection by shopping in person. As a result of this spike in package delivery, FedEx shares doubled between 2020 and 2021. While the package delivery giant raked in record profits, FedEx workers, including flight crews, were forced to stay on the job to keep the industry running as the pandemic raged.

There is a growing movement among flight crews against fatigue, overwork, and sub-inflation pay. In addition to the strike vote at Delta, United Airlines pilots rejected a tentative agreement by a vote of 94 percent and Allied Pilots Association officials at American Airlines were forced by rank-and-file anger to vote down a new deal by 15-5. Flight crews held informational pickets at major US airports last year. Pilots internationally have gone on strike at Ryanair in Spain and Eurowings in Germany.

The ALPA, the largest airline pilot union in the world with over 67,000 pilots at 39 US and Canadian airlines, has kept each of these struggles by pilots separate and isolated from one another.

FedEx pilots have many enemies arrayed against them in this struggle, including the courts, Congress, and the Biden Administration, who claims to be the most “pro-union” president in history but came together with Congress quickly to ban a rail strike.

Pilots should follow the example set by railroad workers who have formed the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Rank-and-file committees are a means for workers to share information, discuss strategy and coordinate actions independent from the unions, who will follow the well-worn path of capitulation to company demands. A rank-and-file committee would be a means to transfer decision-making power from the hands of union bureaucrats to the rank and file, including the ability to countermand union decisions which violate the will and needs of flight crews.

Pilots and crew members interested in assistance in forming rank-and-file committees should contact the WSWS today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: