

Labor Relations Darken at Hawaiian Airlines

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An attempt by management and pilots at Hawaiian Airlines to turn around a strained and difficult post-bankruptcy relationship appears to be failing.

After more than a year of effort to reach a new contract outside of the regular negotiating process, both sides are still far apart and the pilot group is rapidly losing patience, according to the Hawaiian Airlines unit of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA).

A failure would likely put pilots and management on a collision course at a time when both had hoped the airline could quickly capitalize on the market share left after the demise of Aloha Airlines and ATA Airlines earlier this year.

"We're frustrated and disappointed with the slow pace of negotiations," said Capt. Eric Sampson, chairman of ALPA's Hawaiian Airlines Master Executive Council. "This is a billion-dollar airline with huge upside potential, and management's latest proposal isn't even enough to cover annual cost of living increases."

When Hawaiian's 2005 contract became amendable in June 2007, management and union leaders agreed to an expedited process that featured two sessions of intense, but cooperative bargaining last year and, more recently, two sessions using the services of a private mediator. The latest mediation round ended June 13 with the two sides still substantially apart on several key issues.

Over the past 18 months ALPA has given Hawaiian significant contractual relief to enable the airline to capitalize on a number of major business opportunities, including:

allowing Air New Zealand pilots to fly Hawaiian aircraft to Auckland in order to save money on heavy maintenance,

negotiating new equipment language to enable the company to complete the purchase of more than \$4 billion worth of new, state-of-the-art Airbus aircraft,

relaxing contract rules to permit pilots to fly up to FAA limits to respond to the shutdown of its two major competitors in the mainland Hawaii and inter-island markets.

Unfortunately, this cooperative initiative has not been reciprocated by management in contract negotiations, and the year-long experiment to reach an agreement outside the traditional bargaining structure appears to be stalled, forcing ALPA to reconsider whether it should offer any further contract relief until management moves off its original proposals.

"We have bent over backwards to assist the company almost every time they have asked us for help, and our reward is absolutely zero. We wanted to turn a page and start something new with benefits for both sides, but it seems the company's real plan is to delay any agreement as long as possible and to milk the status quo for every cent they can," Sampson said.

"We are rapidly losing our cooperative attitude," he said. "Remember, ALPA is just the first of several unions slated for new contracts. The others are just now beginning their negotiations, but if Hawaiian continues its practice of repackaging the same unsatisfactory proposals over and over, their labor problems will only multiply when the airline should be thriving."

Founded in 1931, ALPA is the world's largest pilots union representing 55,000 pilots at 40 airlines in the U.S. and Canada, including more than 400 pilots at Hawaiian. Visit the ALPA Web site at www.alpa.org for more information.

Source: Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l

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