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Pilots Union Votes To Strike Against Mexicana, Aeromexico

by LADB Staff

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In late February, members of the Pilots Union (Asociacion Sindical de Pilotos Aviadores, ASPA) voted to strike against Aerovias de Mexico S.A., alleging that the company violated a collective bargaining contract with the union.

Despite the vote, ASPA delayed announcing a strike date until March 18 in order to give the company more time to respond to union concerns. Aerovias de Mexico is the parent company for Mexico's two largest airlines, Mexicana and Aeromexico, as well as regional carriers Aeroportiente and Aerolitoral. ASPA, which represents 1,600 pilots at the four airlines, opposes Aerovias's proposed cutbacks in personnel, planned reductions in salary and benefits, increased working hours for pilots, and hiring of non-union personnel for some operations.

ASPA spokespersons told La Jornada that the union especially objects to the company's move to hire non-union pilots for charter flights for Aerolitoral because it would set a bad precedent for the company's future hiring practices. Nevertheless, in a recent interview, Aerovias director Gerardo de Prevoisin argued that by dictating the company's hiring practices, ASPA is attempting to take over a management role. Moreover, he emphasized that the non-union pilots the company had hired were only assigned to charter flights on Aerolitoral, and would not be given posts in Aeromexico or Mexicana.

Regarding the plans to lay off 160 pilots and to reduce benefits, De Prevoisin told reporters the company would not "turn back" from its plans to reduce costs and increase productivity by seeking concessions from the union. Company officials explained that the reduction in the number of pilots is a cost-cutting move, since the new aircraft the company will phase in this year requires only a two-person crew, rather than the three persons needed for the airplanes being replaced. In defending the move, officials also noted that many other major airlines around the world have also been forced to downsize because of a global economic recession.

President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration is following developments in this labor conflict very closely, since a strike involving the country's two largest airlines would represent a significant blow to domestic and foreign air travel.

The only other major Mexican airline Transportes Aereos Ejecutivos (Taesa) flies a limited number of domestic flights. According to La Jornada, ASPA leaders have suggested the appointment of a federal mediator to oversee discussions between the two sides, although no formal request has yet been made to the Labor Secretariat (Secretaria de Trabajo y Prevision Social, STPS).

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