

The PILOTS OF ALPA 2013

Pilots Combat Job Outsourcing

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Staff Writer

Air Transat

The Air Transat pilots have seen the effect that government policy can have on airline operations. The pilots have had to endure the detrimental effects of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the use of wet-leasing by competing airlines for the last few years. Sizeable losses and concerns about diluted demand pushed the airline into downsizing and restructuring in 2012.

ALPA and Air Transat's parent company, Transat A.T., Inc., banded together with Air Canada and WestJet to publicly denounce the Canadian Transportation Agency's November 2012 decision to uphold these practices. The group condemned agency

An Air Transat A330 at Montréal-Trudeau Airport.



COURTESY AIR TRANSAT

approval of Canadian airline Sunwing's seasonal use of four Czech airplanes and overseas flight crews as part of its winter operation.

ALPA and the other aviation stakeholders pointed out that half of Sunwing's pilots and two-thirds of its airplanes in use this winter are from other countries, giving the airline an unfair operating advantage and neglecting unemployed Canadian pilots. Sunwing and similar carriers use these tactics to take advantage of Canadians' travel to the Caribbean and Central and South America during the winter, when demand is at a premium.

"We laid off 56 pilots this fall and had to park two of our A310s," says Capt. Carol Lavoie, the pilots' Master Executive Council (MEC) chairman. To provide the

airline some relief, the pilots agreed to extend the life of their contract by a year, to May 2015. They also agreed to a cost-of-living freeze, approving a bonus program to recoup lost wages if company performance improves.

"We understand that our airline is concerned about overextending itself," says Lavoie. "The airplanes that we parked were eventually going to be replaced, but now, with this fight, we're waiting to see what happens."

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program allows airlines to forgo hiring Canadian pilots and instead employ overseas pilots and save on initial training costs. However, several Canadian airlines have sidestepped the clause

that delineates that foreign workers can be employed only if the company can demonstrate that no suitable Canadian residents can fill the available jobs. Lavoie points out, "It appears that some airlines will overlook a Canadian applicant if he or she doesn't have the specific type rating for the airplanes that airline uses."

In addition, the program calls for reciprocity—i.e., use of available Canadian pilots in the program's participating countries during Canada's summer season—but this policy is not being properly honoured.

Lavoie notes that ALPA's Canada Board has been a strong ally, testifying before Parliament to mitigate the effects of job outsourcing on the Air Transat pilots and other Canadian pilot groups.

During testimony, Capt. Dan Adamus (Jazz), ALPA's Canada Board president, said: "The issue of hiring foreign pilots and its impacts on the labour force are subjects that need to be taken seriously by the federal government. Some airline managements have been abusing the Temporary Foreign Worker Program by using it for competitive advantages instead of filling a labour shortage as originally envisioned by the legislation."

Despite these challenges, Lavoie describes his pilot group's relationship with management as positive. "We have problems here and there, but we have a good channel of communications with senior management, and we're working together to help our airline succeed. However, we also understand that we're a publicly traded company and that we need to make money to stay in business."

Lavoie remains hopeful that the airline industry can convince the Canadian government to see the shortcomings of this destructive policy and act in the best interest of its citizens.

Air Transat offers both scheduled and charter flights using a fleet of Airbus A310s and A330s. The airline balances its southbound operations in the winter with trips to Europe in the summer and carries nearly 2 million passengers per year to 60 destinations in 25 countries. On Nov. 14, 2012, Air Transat celebrated its 25th anniversary. 🌐

At a Glance

- **Pilots joined ALPA:** 1999
- **Number of pilots:** 436 (including furloughees)
- **Headquarters:** Pierre E. Trudeau International Airport, Montreal, P.Q.
- **Pilot bases:** Montreal, P.Q.; Toronto, Ont.; and Vancouver, B.C.
- **Fleet:** 11 A310s and 12 A330s