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Korean Air Lines and Asiana threaten dispute pilots with jail

CHERTSEY 12 July - As a result of two separate industrial disputes at Asiana and Korean Airlines, twelve ALPA-Korea members face the threat of jail terms for their activities in support of union actions.

Following extensive and inconclusive negotiations with their respective airlines, the Asiana Pilot Union (APU) and the Korean Air Flight Crew Union (KALFCU), acting in accordance with the Korean Labor Commission's mediation requirements, gained overwhelming support for industrial action through ballots held recently.

As a result, industrial actions began on 4 July with 'work-to-rule' action by KALFCU pilots, which is on-going, and a 24-hour strike on 6 July by APU members, which warned of a possible general strike within ten days.

In response to these actions, the management at the two airlines has employed strategies far removed from good faith bargaining. Both have resorted to coercive tactics from the beginning, even to the extent of threatening pilots against wearing solidarity ribbons or making informational passenger announcements. So far, twelve pilots in one airline have been singled out for sanctions and may be accused of violating elements of the Korean Aviation Act, which deal with 'abuses of the Captain's authority.' If charged and subsequently found guilty, these pilots may face up to ten years of imprisonment.

The two disputes centre on quite different issues – APU seeks the establishment of a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The CBA will be the first for its pilots, and follows in the wake of the union's recognition by the Korean Supreme Court as the pilots' sole representative bargaining group at Asiana in November of last year. Central to the APU position is a contract clause which limits flying time (including time spent deadheading – or positioning, which is company duty travel by air to or from flight duty assignments) to 1,000 hours per year. Currently long-haul pilots at Asiana can expect to fly up to 1,200 hours a year.

Meanwhile, at Korean Air the dispute centres on minimum rest periods during layovers, especially following long-range international flights. In addition, the union seeks relaxation to KAL's harsh simulator checking and medical testing regimes, which have continually threatened the pilots' employment opportunities.

IFALPA supports our Korean colleagues in their efforts to get fair and equitable agreements.

Notes for editors

The International Federation of Airline Pilot's Associations (IFALPA) is the global voice of pilots representing over 100,000 airline pilots based in 94 countries world-wide. IFALPA's mission is to promote the highest level of aviation safety and security world-wide and providing services, support and representation to all of its Member Associations. See the Federation website www.ifalpa.org