

Air Canada flight attendants defy federal back-to-work order

Airline delays plan to resume service, Ottawa faces political crisis after union refuses to end strike



Picketers line up outside Vancouver International Airport as travellers pass by on Sunday. The Air Canada shutdown had disrupted the plans of roughly 500,000 passengers as of Sunday evening. ETHAN CAIRNS/THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Air Canada scrapped plans to resume service Sunday after the union that represents striking flight attendants said it would defy a federal government order that they return to their jobs.

Instead, the Montreal-based airline said it now plans to resume flights on Monday evening, despite executives with the Canadian Union of Public Employees insisting that they have no intention of ending the walkout, which began early Saturday, without a negotiated collective agreement.

On Sunday morning, the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) directed the airline and striking flight attendants to re-

start service operations for all Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge flights after an order from federal Jobs Minister Patty Hajdu.

The minister ordered the parties to resume work and extend the terms of the existing collective agreement until a new one could be determined by an arbitrator.

That order was set to take effect at 2 p.m. Sunday, but as the deadline came and went, employees assembled outside Toronto Pearson International Airport remained in place and chanted, “Don’t blame me, blame AC.”

“Our members are refusing to give in and go back to work,” said CUPE national president Mark Hancock. “At the end of the day, we’re hancing the law here. The law is wrong, the government is wrong, the company is wrong, and we’re prepared to stand up for these workers as long as it takes.”

Ms. Hajdu made the order under Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, which allows the minister to unilaterally take action to “secure industrial peace.”

Unlike recent instances where the federal government used the process to quickly end strike actions – including in labour disputes involving railways, ports and Canada Post – the refusal of the flight attendants’ union to abide by the current order could create a political crisis for the Liberal government by calling Ottawa’s bluff. It’s not at all clear how a labour quagmire that has left its mark on travellers across the globe will be resolved.

As for passengers whose plans have been thrown into uncertainty, the standoff between the union and Ottawa has only worsened their late-summer travel nightmare.

Cartel violence reaches Ecuador’s ‘last refuge’: the classroom

ANDERSSON BOSCÁN

Schools were once the last safe haven in Ecuador, one of the most violent countries in the world, but now the drug trade has brought fear even into the classroom.

José Albán first felt that terror just a few kilometres from the public school where he has worked for more than a decade, in a rural area of Manabí, a province in the north of the country now under cartel control. It was Feb. 8, 2024. He had just finished work and was heading home with his partner, fellow teacher Tania Carriel, when they were stopped by armed men.

It was the first time Ecuador had heard of teachers being kidnapped.

For 18 hours, the couple endured beatings, humiliation and torture. Their captors told them their release depended on a payment of US\$20,000 – a staggering sum considering that an Ecuadorean teacher’s starting salary is just US\$875.

With the police overwhelmed, victims know their survival depends on raising the money. The couple drained their savings and reached a relative under their captors’ watch. Their school launched a public collection. In the end, they raised US\$5,000, and the kidnappers – who amused themselves at one point by holding a running chainsaw close to the teachers’ arms – let them go.

It is unlikely their attackers will ever be identified. Ecuador’s prosecutor’s office solves just 7 per cent of the crimes it investi-

gates. But the couple suspects it was planned and carried out by students from their own school.

They returned to work days after their release, to the same classrooms where they fear their attackers still sit.

“I try to carry on, but I’ve lost hope,” Mr. Albán said by phone. “I’m speaking to you today after burying one of my students. He was found murdered, lying in the street. I always believed classrooms were the last refuge for these kids. Not any more. Not any more.”

What happened to the couple is not an isolated case. The National Union of Educators (UNE), the country’s largest teachers’ union, has asked authorities to declare the education sector in a state of emergency.



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Putin agreed to NATO-style protections for Ukraine, U.S. envoy says

JILL COLVIN NEW YORK

Russian leader Vladimir Putin agreed at his summit with President Donald Trump that the United States and its European allies could offer Ukraine a security guarantee resembling NATO’s collective defence mandate as part of an eventual deal to end the war, a U.S. official said Sunday.

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff, who took part in the talks Friday at a military base in Alaska, said it “was the first time we had ever heard the Russians agree to that” and called it “game-changing.”

“We were able to win the following concession: that the United States could offer Article 5-like protection, which is one of the real reasons why Ukraine wants to be in NATO,” Mr. Witkoff told CNN’s *State of the Union*.

Mr. Witkoff offered few details on how such an arrangement would work. But it appeared to be a major shift for Mr. Putin and could serve as a work-around to his deep-seated objection to Ukraine’s potential NATO membership, a step that Kyiv has long sought.

It was expected to be a key topic Monday as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and major European leaders meet with Mr. Trump at the White House to discuss ending the 3½-year conflict.

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Zelensky heads back to White House with European leaders at his side ■ A6

Border bill would leave dissidents who visited in past at risk: experts

MARIE WOOLF OTTAWA

Dissidents, human-rights activists and journalists being persecuted by foreign regimes could find themselves unable to get asylum hearings in Canada under planned immigration changes, refugee experts warn.

They are calling on the federal government to create an exception in Bill C-2, the Strong Borders bill, so dissidents can find safe haven here.

As it is currently worded, the bill would exclude dissidents and others from hearings at the Immigration and Refugee Board if they came to Canada more than a year before their claim.

Many – including political opponents of authoritarian regimes – may have visited Canada to attend meetings, speak at summits or give lectures, the experts warn.

Bill C-2, which is going through its parliamentary stages, aims to tighten up immigration rules and is likely to cut the total number of asylum claims. It would put people who have been in Canada for more than a year on a fast track to deportation.

The bill specifies that the one-year period “begins on the day after the day of their first entry.”

Lawyers said a “first entry” would include any previous visit to Canada, including a holiday here.

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