

Airblock To American Flight Progress

Federal mediators are making a fresh attempt to bring an end to the unfortunate pilots' strike against American Airlines. We hope that the attempt will succeed before the company is forced to lay off virtually all of its 17,000 workers.

If the pilots are wise they are bound to realize that they have failed to win the sympathy of the air-minded public. The ordinary air traveler is well aware that piloting a plane is high-tension work, but he is also inclined to view as capricious the current strike against three daily transcontinental nonstop flights involving a 10-hour workday of which, on the average, eight hours and 35 minutes are spent in the air.

Under different circumstances, it might be possible for the pilots to argue that these unusual 10-hour stints are simply the opening wedge for management to institute increasingly longer hours for the airplane drivers. But the pilots know that such is not the case. The consuming purpose of air travel is more and more speed. What

with constantly improving aircraft design, turbo compound and jet engines, the issue raised by the pilots may soon be academic.

The only conceivable victory that the pilots could win in this strike would be to require the airline to break up its east-west flights into two segments to permit a change of crews. In railroading such a practice is called featherbedding. In the case of the birdmen it amounts to feathernesting.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration has certified that the 10-hour stints do not endanger safety, despite the contrary claim of the AFL Air Line Pilots Assn. Moreover, the same union has accepted without a grumble about safety the 12-hour schedules on trans-Atlantic flights.

Commercial aviation has made sensational strides in a relatively brief existence. But progress will be seriously slowed down if the pilots stop sharing the vision and pioneering spirit that has motivated management in this field as well as the designers and builders of aircraft.