

AUGUST 4, 1954

Eight-Hour Day for Pilots

THE nation's biggest airline is grounded for very good reason. There are no pilots to move the throttles, retract the flaps, and orbit the planes around onto the familiar radio beams. The AFL union which is the collective bargaining agent for the pilots says that none of these routine motions will be resumed until American Airlines, and the rest of the industry, gets in the flight pattern and grants an 8-hour day for long haul pilots and crews.

It may be difficult for the union to win much public sympathy for its "downtrodden" pilot members. Senior pilots on the runs in question, the transcontinental, non-stop routes, fly 10 days a month and get 20 off. They make \$17,000 a year upward and are given all of the mechanical and electronic aviation aids that science can think up, in addition to copilots, flight engineers, and so on.

The whole thing started because American inaugurated a new non-stop, East-West transcontinental service between New York and Los Angeles. Because of prevailing winds the flight westward is scheduled at eight hours and 35 minutes. It takes a full hour less flying east-bound.

Now we'll agree quickly that if we're flying someplace we want a fresh and alert crew in the cockpit forward. However, the transatlantic flights, some of them at least, consume 10 and more hours in the air. Nearly all of them, to be sure, include one or more stops, which relieves tension. The government watchdog, the Civil Aeronautics Authority, has looked long and hard at the situation and called this stretch of time in the cockpit not dangerous.

The airline pilots are making the danger factor their basic reason for striking the airline. They contend that eight hours and 35 minutes aloft is dangerous; seven hours and 35 minutes — the elapsed time of the eastern non-stop trip—doesn't seem to rub. With those figures before us we just don't know, but it looks as if the pilots were more concerned with getting some overtime, or some new fringe benefit, than with passenger safety.

But there is a problem here and it's time the issue was settled. The pilots are offering a compromise which would involve a 20-minute stop-over, probably in mid-continent, for a change of crews. But this would obviate a non-stop flight, which does have sales merit and appeal. The CAA, which has been granting waivers for 10-hour overseas flights, may want to look the whole situation over again, and it may agree that an 8-hour day is all that should be flown for the passengers' sake. In the meantime, we don't believe the pilots would be shortening their flying years by going back to work while the issue is argued.