

Air Strike Seems Unjustified

The grounding of all American Airlines planes by a strike of its 1,200 pilots is hinged on such a flimsy issue that the company's \$1,250,000 damage suit against the AFL pilots' union seems fully justified.

Last fall when American instituted non-stop flights between New York and Los Angeles with new DC-7s, it scheduled the westbound flights—against prevailing winds—at 7 hours 55 minutes and eastbound flights at 7 hours 15 minutes. These time schedules fell within the eight hour limit fixed for pilots on domestic flights.

When a check, instituted by the union, showed that American was not keeping up with its schedules, the line rescheduled the westbound flight at 8 hours 35 minutes. It also added 20 minutes to the eastbound schedule.

At the same time, the line applied for and obtained a temporary waiver from the civil aeronautics board setting a 10 hour limit for pilots on the nonstop transcontinental service.

The union still protested the extra 35 minutes, insisting that for safety the westbound flights be given relief crews. The company offered to arbitrate. It contended that nonstop flying in excess of eight hours did not constitute a hazard. It further pointed out that in international service, with more dangerous flights over vast stretches of ocean, pilots who are members of the same union may be scheduled to fly as much as 12 hours. Yet American's pilots struck, tying up the operations of the largest domestic carrier.

For the safety of passengers, there obviously must be limits to the time pilots and co-pilots spend at the controls. But the eight hour rule was set 23 years ago when flights across the continent were a series of take-offs and landings. Furthermore, the history of aviation has been one of steadily greater speeds. In a matter of months, coast to coast flights will likely be completed well within the eight hour period.

This strike, it should be noted, involves no "poor workingmen." The first pilot on a transcontinental DC-7 is paid \$19,000 a year, the co-pilot \$11,000 and the crew chief \$7,000. Each crew makes five round trips a month, is on duty 10 days a month and off 20, with total flight time not exceeding 85 hours a month.

Two other air lines—United and Trans World—also offered nonstop coast to coast service. Like American, they received waivers from the aeronautics board. But apparently because they continued to schedule westbound flights at 7 hours 55 minutes, their operations were not closed down even though the union president conceded that their schedules were not "realistic."

It looks as though the American Airlines pilots and their union are the ones who are not "realistic."