

FedEx pilots set informational picket

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FedEx Express pilots formed a wall along Democrat near the company's world hub Tuesday to show solidarity with their union and push for a labor contract covering about 4,200 pilots.

An estimated 400 to 700 pilots lined a sidewalk in front of the FedEx Express air operations center for about 45 minutes to protest the pace of negotiations with the Memphis-based company.

Scott Stratton, an FedEx MD-11 captain who is chairman of FedEx's Air Line Pilots Association International (ALPA) unit, said the company has taken "the old school path" in negotiations rather than working collaboratively with the union to reach a new agreement. The event came 18 months after ALPA's current contract with the company became open for renegotiation.

"The contract negotiations have gone on too long. What the pilots seek is a fair and respectful contract in a timely manner," Stratton said. "Unfortunately, FedEx chose the old school path, and that's what this is about."

FedEx spokesman Jim McCluskey said, "The negotiating process takes time. It's that simple. We're working hard and committed to reaching an agreement as soon as possible, and we want that agreement to be beneficial to both the pilots and the company."

ALPA officials estimated the crowd at 550 to nearly 700, while FedEx officials suggested it was closer to 400. Either way, it was a battalion of crisply uniformed flight officers standing at attention as FedEx trucks and other vehicles passed the nerve center of FedEx's global network.

ALPA staged smaller demonstrations at hubs in Anchorage, Alaska and Los Angeles on Tuesday and has scheduled rallies at hubs in Cologne, Germany and Hong Kong this weekend.

Chuck Dyer, an MD-11 captain who helped organize the demonstration, said he was overwhelmed by the turnout. “For me, it was pretty emotional to see the kind of guys who are standing here with me.”

The union shuttled pilots from Germantown’s Great Hall and Conference Center in 10 chartered buses, and other pilots came in their own vehicles.

Neither side revealed details about sticking points in bargaining.

FedEx Express is the biggest revenue producer of FedEx Corp.’s three operating segments, but the air express unit’s profit margin lags well behind that of the ground parcel delivery unit FedEx Ground.

Company officials contend FedEx pilots are the best paid in the industry, with an average salary of \$234,210. Salaries average \$124,775 for pilots with one to five years of FedEx service and \$297,117 for those with 20-plus years.

“Our pilots enjoy the best pay and benefits package in the industry,” McCluskey said.

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