American ATC unsafe, claim Canada’s controllers

CANADIAN air-traffic controllers say that the US ATC system is unsafe. They have asked their government to suspend flights to the USA “until a normal controller service is restored.” The Canadian controllers believe that there have been more than 60 breaches of safety rules since their American counterparts went on strike on August 3. Canada’s transport ministry says that there have been only 42, and that this is “normal.” No incident created a hazardous situation and there was no danger to US or Canadian air travellers, the department adds.

Canadian Air Traffic Controllers Association president William Robertson says “The only way to guarantee safety for air travellers in Canada is to isolate our control system from that of the USA.” But Canadian controllers will honour their 90-day agreement with the government not to disrupt US-Canadian services, according to Robertson.

In the USA, Allied Pilots Association executive administrator Ralph Harkenrider tells Flight that its pilots find the system “as safe as it was before the strike. With general aviation flying much reduced, there is not the competing traffic that there was.” He believes that Patco has lost over the issue, because the system is being demonstrated to work well.

Patco disagrees. According to its national legislation director Patrick Doyle, winter will make the current system “deteriorate and crumble,” because pilots will want more airspace to avoid bad weather. VFR flying will of necessity decrease, and most of the controllers working do not have the experience to handle the increased separation requirements thus generated, he says.

The FAA denies this. Schedules may be affected temporarily by very bad weather, but it has computerised flow-control to cope with precisely this problem and that of reduced manning levels. The staff has 11 years’ experience dealing with extreme ATC problems.

Patco believes that talks held by Transport Secretary Drew Lewis, Government Director of Offices and Personnel Donald Devine and American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) president Kenneth Blaylock are the first positive move towards a reconciliation between the Reagan Administration and the sacked controllers. News of the talks was leaked about a week after they began.

The FAA says that Government representatives Lewis and Devine were not negotiating towards the controllers’ reinstatement. The talks were to assure the AFGE that the Reagan Administration is not anti-union: it regards Patco as a special case because it acted illegally.

New UK airship ready for flight

AIRSHIP Industries is due to fly its Skyship 500 this week from RAF Cardington, Bedfordshire. Skyship 500 is a new technology, non-rigid airship, intended as a maritime-patrol platform.

The craft is based on the Aerospace Developments AD-500, which first flew more than two years ago (see Flight for February 24, 1979). Many detail improvements have been made by the same design team. These include a new envelope material, better actuators and an overall weight-saving of about 500lb. Skyship 500 has a useful payload of roughly 2 tons, achieved with a helium volume of just over 180,000ft³.

Some £1.5 million has been invested in the project and Airship Industries plans to invest a further £2 million in building four more craft. The extra money will be raised from public and private institutional subscribers later this year. There are no buyers so far, but Airship Industries plans to hire out the craft—mainly for evaluation by interested parties such as the British and Belgian Governments.

A wet lease would cost £80,000–£100,000 a month, depending on the tasks required. Airship Industries expects to have leasing agreements for four craft by the end of January 1982, each typically lasting a few months.

 Asking price for a Skyship 500 is £1.2 million (1981), but the company does not want to begin selling until about the end of 1982. It prefers the flexibility of interim leasing, which allows more control over operation and geographical distribution.

One potential customer for Airship Industries is the US Coast Guard, which has just issued a request for proposals on a 10-ton payload, 706,000ft², maritime-patrol airship. The request covers a study and the construction of a smaller airship demonstrator.

Airship Industries is entering a bid, and there is a chance that Skyship 500 will fit the bill as a demonstrator. Bids are due with the US Coast Guard by mid-November. Airship manufacturer Goodyear is also expected to enter the competition. Airship Industries is at 2 York Street, London W1, tel 01-486 3556.

146 first flight imminent

BRITISH AEROSPACE appears to stand a good chance of getting its 146 airliner into the air for the first time as this issue of Flight is published. The first flight of the aircraft, from Hatfield, is scheduled to explore general handling characteristics and to last for more than an hour.

Challenger E halted

CANADAIR has suspended work on its stretched Challenger—the Challenger E. Wind-tunnel tests show that the combination of longer airframe and General Electric CF34 engines will not reach the performance targets.

The manufacturer will concentrate its efforts on development of the standard Challenger 600 (powered by Avco Lycoming ALF502s) and the CF34-powered 601. Canadair says that there will be no employee layoffs and the company will “continue to study Challenger growth, including a stretch, as future technology permits.”

General Electric tells Flight that its CF34—a derivative of the military TF54—is fulfilling its performance estimates including the 8,650lb-thrust rating. GE says that the CF34 has capacity for power increase. It is likely that this increase could accommodate any extra power required by the Challenger E, should the type be revived. Total TF54 running time is more than one million hours.

Canadair has orders and deposits for 136 600s and 601s, and orders for 49 Challenger Es. The company hopes that customers for the stretched Challenger will accept either 600s or 601s. Sixteen 600s have been delivered to completion centres and a number are in service. The prototype 601 is being assembled; it should fly early next year.

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