
Air Canada strike deepens as government weighs response options



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MONTREAL — Air Canada’s ongoing strike has intensified debate over unpaid work rules for flight attendants, following recent labor gains in the United States. At American Airlines and Alaska Airlines, new contracts now mandate pay from the moment boarding begins, a practice Canadian crews are also demanding.

The Canadian government faces limited options to resolve the dispute after the airline's union defied a Canadian Industrial Relations Board order to return to work. Authorities could ask courts to enforce compliance or seek an expedited hearing. Another possibility is introducing back-to-work legislation, though such a step would require cooperation from opposition parties and approval in both chambers of Parliament, currently in recess until September 15.

Experts caution against heavy-handed intervention. "The government will be very reticent to act too forcefully, because in Canada the Supreme Court has ruled that governments must be careful when limiting the right to strike," said Dionne Pohler, professor of dispute resolution at Cornell University. She suggested that encouraging renewed bargaining may be the most viable path forward.

While previous administrations intervened to prevent strikes in rail and dock sectors that threatened economic disruption, it remains highly unusual for unions to openly defy a federal labor order. The Air Canada dispute now places additional pressure on both the airline and the minority government to reach a compromise.