

Can You Imagine?



By Capt. John Prater, ALPA President



When the United States and the European Union (EU) reached a tentative agreement in March in Brussels, Belgium, to amend their 2007 air transport agreement (see page 15), I stopped to reflect on what our union has accomplished in this most recent threat to our jobs. What does it mean for pilots across our industry?

If the EU had its way, for example, foreign investors could own and control your airline. It wouldn't matter if you fly for a major, a regional, or a cargo airline—you'd feel their market presence because these investors wouldn't stop at ownership. They'd want the opportunity to bid on flying around the states, too. ALPA, working with the Transportation Trades Department (TTD) of the AFL-CIO, led the fight against these proposed changes and scored a major win with this tentative agreement, which would make no change to foreign ownership and cabotage laws.

But we didn't stop there. ALPA, in close coordination with the TTD and the European Cockpit Association, worked with the U.S. and EU negotiators to educate them about our concerns on how the agreement could affect airline workers. As a result of this collaboration, for the first time in the history of U.S. air service agreements, the tentative agreement also proposes to add an article on labor.

In this article, the U.S. and the EU state that they recognize the value of "high labour standards," and the parties will regularly review the agreement's effect on airline workers. There's also a Memorandum of Consultations that recognizes how, in the U.S., the selection of a single representative promotes rights for airline workers not only to organize, but also to negotiate and enforce collective bargaining agreements.

ALPA represented pilot interests in a similar manner in the Canada-EU negotiations last year, again helping to ensure that no statutory changes were made to the Canadian ownership and control and cabotage laws as part of the resulting air services agreement.

Yes, ALPA's role at these negotiations helped stave off significant statutory changes that could have dramatically affected the livelihood of every airline pilot. But only for the time being—this fight will never end. Think about what could happen if foreign airlines sought to bend the rules just a little. A case in point: Air Canada's season-long charters for U.S. sports teams, such as the Boston Bruins.

Had ALPA not stepped in, there would have been more than the camel's nose under the tent. Instead, we took

the issue on full throttle. We teamed up not only with the AFL-CIO and the Association of Flight Attendants, but with airline trade associations as well, to advise the Department of Transportation (DOT) and Congress of our cabotage concerns. After an investigation, the DOT found that Air Canada was carrying prohibited cabotage traffic on these charters, and it took the appropriate actions.

In this latest round of negotiations, your union and your government worked to prevent your jobs from going overseas. You should not think that international issues can't or don't affect you or that your job is immune to this option, because alliance managers and investors simply do not care who flies these routes or who flies the airplanes. When it

ALPA's role at the U.S.-EU negotiations helped stave off significant statutory changes that could dramatically affect the livelihood of every airline pilot. But only for the time being—this fight will never end.

comes right down to it, only you and your union care about protecting these jobs for ALPA pilots.

Long ago, ALPA pinpointed revenue sharing as a particular area of concern in airline alliances, noting that this allows alliances to achieve their goal of "metal neutrality," or an "indifference" to which alliance partner actually operates the aircraft so long as the alliance captures the customer's business. Well, that "indifference" carries over to the question of which alliance partner's employees fly a certain route, too. In other words, your airlines could basically decide to become "travel agents" for their foreign alliance partners—and that means significant portions of the pilot jobs within these alliances could fly right overseas. Not to mention that it's some of the most desirable work—long-haul, large aircraft, international flying—for many pilots around.

Concerned? Don't sit on the sidelines. Get involved. You can join ALPA in the Call to Action to build job security into our airlines' international alliances. Contact your federal representatives today and ask them to support H.R. 4788, a bipartisan bill supported by ALPA that would ensure that the DOT requires our carriers to "play to get paid" if it approves an alliance's request for antitrust immunity. After all, airline alliances are only good for you if you're still flying the airplane.