

Anne-Marie Walsh: Fears of knock-on claims as pilots' demands raise expectations among other workers

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A pay rise close to 18pc may well cool the Aer Lingus pilots' jets, but could encourage wage demands to take off. There has been speculation that there will be knock-on claims by other groups of staff at the airline if the pilots are seen to get more.

Cabin crew and ground-handling staff got around 12pc in recent pay deals.

On the face of it, the claim from the Irish Air Line Pilots' Association (Ialpa) is for a pay rise worth twice as much as this.

However, their colleagues' agreements stretch across three years.

The court's new recommendation for the pilots would cover four.

Should they choose to accept it, the pilots would get the best part of their 24pc opening gambit. The pay rises would be spread over four years, but are heavily frontloaded because of backdated payments.

Aer Lingus agrees to Labour Court's proposal for 17.75pc pay increase

The Labour Court's recommendation to end this highly disruptive dispute is being seen by many in union circles as a good deal. It was already reported that the pilots were prepared to drop their demand to around 22pc.

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Industry insiders say pilots at Ryanair do not earn nearly as much as their Aer Lingus colleagues, a reflection partly of transatlantic services

Aer Lingus may not be the only airline that is watching nervously – although the pilots maintain that they are paid less than most, if not all, crews flying over the Atlantic.

Industry insiders say pilots at Ryanair do not earn nearly as much as their Aer Lingus colleagues, a reflection partly of transatlantic services. But this gap has existed for years, and many believe the pay proposal will do little to change that.

The court's 18pc pay rise recommendation is not as massive as it might appear at first. Crucially, it covers a period of four years. This means it is worth just under 4.5pc a year. It is not that far ahead of another wage deal done earlier this year that was also in the headlines.

The court's new proposal may entice the pilots because of the big upfront increases

This was the national pay deal brokered by Ialpa's parent union Fórsa and other unions on behalf of 385,000 public servants. They are in line for pay rises of 10.25pc over two-and-a-half years under that deal. A total of 4.25pc is payable this year, 4pc next year, and 2pc in roughly half a year to June 2026.

The court's new proposal, signed by chairman Kevin Foley, may entice the pilots because of the big upfront increases. There are other extras. One of the biggest selling points is the fact that no extra productivity or flexibility is required. This has appeared to be a line in the sand for Ialpa throughout the dispute.

There are only so many groups of workers with the pilots' industrial muscle that can bring crucial services to a halt.

But the court recommendation is not going unnoticed. The pilots' demands will have raised expectations among workers to demand inflation-proofed pay.

'Ultimately, whenever a group of workers gets something in a particular area, it will have an impact'

Yesterday, just hours after the recommendation was published, it was being referred to in relation to another brewing row. Siptu sector organiser Brendan Carr was speaking about a dispute involving staff who provide services for disabled people at the National Advocacy Service.

"The approach of the Government towards community workers, in refusing to assist with the implementation of a Labour Court recommendation, is in stark contrast to ministers' calls for the Labour Court to be respected in the Aer Lingus pilots' dispute," he said.

A senior union official said the court proposal is a good one, and comes with a lot of sweeteners. "The chunk of change is coming from the pay retrospection," he said. "Ultimately, whenever a group of workers gets something in a particular area, it will have an impact."

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