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Montreal Strike Grounds Air Canada Summer Flights

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Air Canada faced major disruptions on August 16, 2025, after thousands of its flight attendants launched a nationwide strike, their first since 1985. The action, organised by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), led to the cancellation of about 500 flights, affecting more than 100,000 passengers during one of the busiest travel periods of the year.

The dispute centres on pay and working conditions. Flight attendants stated they are not compensated for certain portions of their duties, such as time spent during boarding or waiting between flights. Air Canada had proposed a new contract with a 38 percent increase

in total compensation over four years, including a 25 percent raise in the first year, and partial pay for ground duties at half the hourly flight rate. The union rejected the proposal, saying it did not fully address long-standing concerns.

At Toronto Pearson International Airport, passengers reported frustration over cancellations. One traveller from Montreal, Freddy Ramos, 24, described how his flight was repeatedly delayed and ultimately cancelled minutes before boarding. “It was cancelled and then delayed and then cancelled again,” Ramos said.

Air Canada, which carries around 130,000 passengers daily, attempted to manage the situation by phasing in cancellations. The airline also issued a lockout notice to cabin crew, a measure intended to increase pressure on the union during negotiations.

The strike drew the attention of Canada’s federal government. Jobs Minister Patty Hajdu urged both sides to resume talks, while officials confirmed that binding arbitration could be applied under the Canada Labour Code if the dispute significantly affects economic stability. The union has opposed arbitration, maintaining that negotiations should remain the path to resolution.

Industry analysts noted that extended disruptions could result in reduced revenue for Air Canada and create operational difficulties. With the airline entering one of its busiest quarters, both financial and service-related risks are present.

Businesses reliant on air travel expressed concern. Some trade groups called on the government to intervene, pointing to existing trade tensions between Canada and the United States that have already created pressures in cross-border commerce. They said further disruption in air services could increase difficulties for exporters and travellers.

For now, passengers are left to deal with refunds and rebookings, while the airline and union remain in disagreement. With hundreds of flights grounded and discussions ongoing, the resolution of the dispute will determine how quickly Air Canada can return to normal operations.