



Buenos Aires City Centre, February 11, 2021

Post-Pandemic Labour Dynamics in Argentinean Aviation

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The post-pandemic era: recovery and challenges

Growth: 36.9% year-on-year (YoY),

Traffic : 94.1% of 2019 levels
[measured in revenue
passenger-kilometer (RPKs)]

[\(IATA, December 2023\)](#)

→ **Knowledge gap:** loss
of highly qualified and
experienced workers

→ **“Great Resignation”:**
migration to other
sectors, and
challenges in hiring
and retaining staff

[\(ILO, 2023\)](#)

In Argentina, the COVID-19 crisis accelerated a previous one in companies like Avianca, Andes and LATAM

This process began with market liberalisation policies in 2016: the Airplanes' Revolution

Ezeiza, Buenos Aires International Airport, October 20, 2020





LATAM Airways

- largest internal market share for private airlines (16%) and part of largest holding in South America
- workers' mobilisation actions, even under strict lockdown policies
- the company's withdrawal altered the market composition and labour relations
- a setback in a long pursuit of escalating improvements in working conditions and step-by-step organisation

How did the development and outcomes of the 2020 labour conflict in LATAM Airways lay the ground for restructuring labour relations within the Argentinean aviation sector?



Research aims



- 1) **analyse** cabin crew **strategies** to navigate and resist the impact of the COVID-19 aviation crisis, focusing on the different actors involved
- 2) examine how LATAM Airways **corporate policies** of pressure and dismissals functioned as a disciplinary tool for workers' resistance
- 3) explore how the conflict in LATAM Airways has impacted the **internal power dynamics** within AAA, addressing how this affected the negotiation of a new collective agreement.

Methodology

- documents and audiovisuals produced by workers' organisations, including CBLs
- national aviation regulation, minutes from the Ministry of Labour, reports and data produced by ICAO and IATA, the and LATAM public corporate reports.
- 3 open-ended interviews with a AAA union delegates and 10 interviews to workers in individual and shared fieldwork ([Cufre and Miguel, 2021](#))
- Preliminary results discussed with union aviation specialist Dina Feller
- Informal conversations during in-person and remote fieldwork (2021 - 2021)
- participant observation in my international travels to and from Germany in 2020 (DAAD scholarship) and 2022 (ICDD, UniKassel)

2005: LAN
Argentina

Regional expansion
Anti-union policy

2012
LATAM

2016: Airplanes
Revolution

Market
liberalisation
policies

December

Working hours
regulation
changed

April

50% salary
reductions

February

Final
dismissals

PRE- PANDEMIC

2020

2021

2022

2015

CBA: AAA (industry
union) & LATAM
Argentina

2019


staff reductions
and negative
balances

June

Press
announcement
“cease
operations”

December

New CBA



How did the development and outcomes of the 2020 labour conflict in LATAM Airways lay the ground for restructuring labour relations within the Argentinean aviation sector?

1) **analyse cabin crew strategies** to navigate and resist the impact of the COVID-19 aviation crisis, focusing on the different actors involved

Protest in Buenos Aires,
February 11, 2021



Comunidad Tripulantes

cabin crew workers, union
delegates of the Asociación
Argentina de
Aeronavegantes
(AAA), national cabin crew
union

Trabajadores de LATAM en Lucha

cabin crew workers + other
workers and unions + left
political parties activists

1. Cabin crew Strategies & Actions



- #NoALaExtorsiónLATAM [Say no to LATAM extortion]
- Media visibility
- Coordinated actions with technicians and pilots such as occupations and caravans
- Flashmob
- Interlocutors: Ministry of Labour vs. Ministry of Transport



1. The flashmob: Mixing the Novel and the Tradition

The vindication of their **professional role**, evident in language - e.g. professional instead of job continuity - and also the use of work equipment and uniforms for mobilisations, is a typical feature of the **aeronautical collective** (Cufre, 2019)



Source: Instagram, @tcpslatam

2. LATAM corporate policies as a disciplinary tool



- Use of pandemic uncertainty
- Withdrawal vs. bankruptcy
- 1522 out of 1715 workers had accepted “voluntary retirements” by February 2021
- Judicialization
- Women delegates or former delegates, opposed to the union leadership were dismissed

3. Post-pandemic aviation labour regulation in Argentina

presidential decree announced in December 2020 modified maximum working hours

- **flying time** (from takeoff to landing)
9 to 11
- **and flying service time** (includes tasks performed before and after the flight)
13 to 15

The longer the working time, the greater the number of departures and landings that can be scheduled in a single working day

3. Post-pandemic aviation labour regulation in Argentina

New collective bargaining agreement: AAA and national airline chamber (CCT 2022).

- **Key aspects are open to be discussed at the company level:** professional categories, tasks, salaries and working hours
- **Language** refers to female and male workers. Includes article on **non-discrimination** and equal opportunities workers, passengers and job applicants

Contributions for theoretical debate

- beyond the ‘institutionalised collective action model’ by analysing the processual construction of organising ([Atzeni, 2010](#); [Atzeni & Sacchetto, 2023A](#))
- features from past trade union wage traditions persist as inputs into **workers' collective identifications** ([Adamini, 2016](#))
- union tradition was reinterpreted through a contestation from their **labouring bodies** ([Rioux, 2015](#); [Cufré & Engelhardt, 2024](#); Cufré & Miguel, forthcoming)
- “**corporate policies**” as a constant arena of dispute (Figari, [2021](#); [2017](#); [Figari & Palermo, 2009](#); [Giniger & Cufré, 2016](#))

What was at stake?



- 30% of the domestic market is operating with undermined working standards [flying by resolution]
- **LATAM legacy:** skip the traditional industrial relations framework
- Flexibility & pink washing. Consolidation of conservative union leadership

“We want to continue working in the aviation sector”

Protest in Buenos Aires, February 11, 2021

Strengthening of two global trends in the local scenario

- massive waivers (in AR increased cabin crew rotation rate (Cufré & Miguel, forthcoming)
- work intensification ([Gillet & Tremblay, 2021](#)) or Ryanarisation ([Cufré & Engelhardt, 2024](#))

A LA NUEVA FORMA DE VOLAR, NO LE IMPORTAMOS.

[The new way of flying don't care about us]

Flashmob screenshot, [Youtube](#) @tcpslatam



Thanks!

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