

Martinair denies that it has a structural shortage of pilots

AMSTERDAM - One of the pilots who have complained about too high a workload at Martinair, turns out to have enough energy outside of work for a side job as a flight instructor. He teaches at Martinair's own flight school.

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He has taught 220 hours in the first seven months of this year, in addition to his full job as a commercial pilot at Martinair. "A very serious matter," responds Martinair spokesman Udo Buijs. "If you do so much extra work, you shouldn't whine about the workload."

But Paul Griffioen of the pilots' union VNV thinks the complaint about excessive pressure remains valid. "We have heard from thick twenty percent of Martinair pilots that the pressure has become too high. In a conversation with us last week, Martinair itself acknowledged that it has been excessively busy this year."

"Certainly, it is busy," the company spokesman acknowledged. "But we will never force anyone to fill in. The pilot must always judge for himself whether he is equipped enough to take to the air. There are situations when you suddenly need a substitute. A passenger doesn't care if a pilot is sick or nauseous. The passenger wants to get to his destination."

According to Martinair pilot Ed Folmer, there is a structural shortage of pilots at the company. "You can hardly call a shortage of pilots that has existed for some time 'sudden'," he wrote last month in the small-circulation union magazine '*Op de bok*'. "Nevertheless, the phone regularly rings in spare time: 'Would you please go to . . ., you're the last one. For that day you get two in return'." But what good are those days if you can't even get three days off in a row in August, complains the pilot.

"A structural shortage? There isn't," responds Buijs of Martinair. "We occasionally have a temporary shortage, especially if a new aircraft is added for which we are still training our own pilots. Then we hire qualified pilots temporarily. But then again, the union is against that."

That the complaining pilot does find time for teaching has gone down the wrong path with Martinair. "We didn't start it. It was angry colleagues of his who brought this up. There are pilots who have come to ask demonstratively for more work."

That a busy aviator still finds time for an extensive teaching practice, Griffioen doesn't think is surprising. "Lessons on small planes are very different from flying large complicated aircraft with hundreds of passengers who want to be on time. With lessons you also don't have to deal with night flights and time differences, which can be very exhausting."

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According to Martinair, however, the pilots have nothing to complain about. "We remain far below the legal maximum of 1,000 hours per year and even below the collective agreement of 800 hours."

Trade unionist Griffioen thinks that's too narrow a view. "If you only look at the flight hours, that's true," Griffioen says. "But flight preparation, post-preparation and waiting are not counted. Because of the hustle and bustle in the air, the waiting times increase. And those are definitely not rest periods."

The unionist finds it strange that Martinair pretends not to know who teaches at their own flight school in Lelystad. "That pilot was even asked to teach the director in Lelystad when a new aircraft was purchased there. That's really no secret in a company like that."

Buijs insists, however, that the flight school is an entirely separate company, even though 100 percent of the shares are owned by Martinair Holland. "They have their own business operations there. We don't deal with that in detail."

Griffioen and Buijs agree on one thing: safety is beyond this argument. The unionist: "I didn't say anything about safety," Griffioen states. "I was angry when some pilots started talking about that in the publicity. We are raising the issue of workload."

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