

McCartin, Joseph Anthony. *Collision course: Ronald Reagan, the air traffic controllers, and the strike that changed America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 472 p. ISBN: 978-0-19-983678-9.

McCartin's in-depth archival and oral history research, including interviews with participants from both sides, has produced an insightful study of the PATCO strike of 1981 and its aftermath. While the air traffic controllers saw themselves as professionals more than unionists, they organized PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) in 1968 when their requests for newer equipment, overtime pay, hiring more controllers, and a change in the "hierarchy-bound" work environment were ignored. Its formation also followed shortly upon President Kennedy's Executive Order 10988, which gave federal workers collective bargaining rights. When the union was unable to win substantial gains through subsequent contracts, PATCO's more militant activists assumed union leadership in 1980. Having used job actions such as slowdowns and sickouts in the past, these leaders began planning for a possible strike in 1978, three years before the renewal date for the contract. However, the Federal Aviation Administration, too, aware of the union's activities, created a contingency plan in case of a strike, which it ultimately was able to use to keep the system going. During the 1981 contract negotiations, the relatively inexperienced PATCO negotiating team presented "the most far-reaching set of demands ever made by a union of federal workers." (p. 240) When the PATCO membership rejected the tentative agreement and went out on strike, they initiated an action they knew was illegal and which violated their no-strike oath. In his speech on August 3, 1981, President Ronald Reagan gave the strikers 48 hours to return to work. The majority of the strikers did not, and Reagan kept his word and fired them. After the union was broken, ways of rehiring at least some of the controllers were proposed by various groups, including some within the administration, but Reagan sought to maintain his tough national and international image and refused to rehire any of the striking controllers. McCartin estimates that breaking the walkout cost the government, the airlines, and the public billions of dollars, and for many years afterwards, marginalized the strike as a tool of labor relations.