

National

Controllers coping with strike woes

United Press International
James Clarry can't afford to fix a car, and when he takes his kids to a ball game, he buys cheap seats. Bob Westra stopped eating steak and devotes more time to t-shirt-making. Jesse Johnson is hunting and spending his savings.

Clarry, Westra and Johnson are among the 11,400 air traffic controllers who walked off their jobs Aug. 3 and refused to return. President Reagan ordered the Federal Aviation Agency to fire them.

Nearly two months later, with planes on reduced flights because of the walkout and a new legion of controllers being trained, the discharged men and women are coping—some better than others.

Some have found new jobs; others are still looking. Many have gone without a paycheck for about 90 days. Some are struggling to pay bills; others say savings and allowances will keep them afloat for a while longer.

A few privately say they made a mistake by going on strike. Many insist they aren't sorry and speak in words of praise for their embattled union, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization.

"I think this strike was necessary because the vast majority of the controllers couldn't work under the existing conditions," said Clarry, 35, who was an air controller earning \$42,000 a year at Long Island's MacArthur Airport.

"I have no regrets," he said. But he said he has felt some regret at times while he waits to take a new job.

"I have a 1973 Capri whose roof rack," he said. "It has no muffler and one of the tail lights is broken, but I don't have the money to take the repairs."

Clarry recently took his two children to a ball game, he said. "We just go general admission seats, and there were no souvenirs for the kids. I felt really bad. The kids really don't understand how things are."

The controllers, who were earning an average salary of \$33,000 a year, went on strike in demand for higher pay and improved working conditions. They complained that eye-racking demands of their job forced many into early retirement.

Despite Reagan's vow not to rehire fired controllers to be replaced, some hold hope they will get their jobs back, eventually.

These discharged controllers are highly trained men and women in a highly specialized field, one that doesn't lend itself to

much more than guiding planes in and out of airports.

Westra, 33, who was a controller at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport earning \$39,000 a year, is at work in his basement building cabinets.

"I've gotten into (cabinet-making) a little more seriously since the strike began," Westra said.

"I've got to replace a sizable salary. I have been talking to a few people about switching careers—some kind of financial job."

For many discharged controllers their financial plight has been eased by working spouses.

Not so for Johnson. Just five weeks after he went on strike, his wife joined other Philadelphia school teachers who walked off

their jobs.

"It is especially tight for us right now," said Johnson, 34, said.

"As far as making mortgage and car payments, the Communication Workers of America has donated \$1 million for these purposes in emergencies, so no one has yet lost a house or a car."

Several unions have contributed money to help the controllers, who had no strike fund of their own and who have been, in most states, denied unemployment benefits.

Fired controllers may be eligible for food stamps, however, depending on their financial condition.

"During the past week or so, my funds ran out. I had to get food stamps," one discharged control-

ler said. "But I don't want my name used. I have a son, and he might be teased in school if the other kids knew."

In Atlanta, a discharged controller now working for a courier service has had second thoughts over his decision to strike.

"It's caused a lot of anguish in families," said the man, who has three children and also asked not to be identified. "If I had to do it over again, knowing all the anguish, I would probably have stayed (on the job)."

J. Paige King, president of the PACTO local in Roanoke, Va., doesn't look back.

He said he backs PATCO 100 percent. "They only thing they did was coordinate this thing," he said. "The desire to strike and improve our working conditions was very evident throughout the working ranks."

As for what it has accomplished, King said, "If nothing else, the air traffic controller is no longer the hidden, unheard of, invisible sector of the aviation industry."

Chris Laskey, 34, a former O'Hare controller said: "We've never been gung-ho strike. What we're gung-ho for is that we want this job changed—fixed—so that people can survive it."

Postage stamps 20 cents Nov. 1

United Press International
WASHINGTON — The price of a first class stamp will go to 20 cents on Nov. 1, the U.S. Postal Service announced Wednesday. They added that the jump should forestall any further increases for another two years.

The move, which is likely to be challenged in court by various consumer and user groups, marks the first time the Board of Governors of the service have approved a general

increase without going through the independent Postal Rate Commission.

Just two weeks ago, the commission turned down a request from the board for a 20-cent first class stamp.

Postmaster General William Bolger said the increase would bring in about \$1 billion in additional revenue and will allow the service the break even for the fiscal year which begins today.

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