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The Professional Air Traffic Controllers Strike: A Retrospective Analysis

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THE PROFESSIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS STRIKE:
A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

by

Steven E. Durnin

A Thesis Submitted to the
Office of Graduate Programs
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Aeronautical Science

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October 1994
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Steven E. Durnin

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the
candidate's thesis committee chairman, Professor Marvin L. Smith, Department of Aeronautical Science, and has been approved by the members of his thesis committee. It was submitted to the Office of Graduate Programs and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Aeronautical Science.

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11/10/95
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is dedicated to the memory of Bill Taylor. His passing in 1994 culminated 13 years of work on behalf of fired controllers as the leader of "PATCO Lives”. His weekly recorded updates were informative and a source of comraderie for many former controllers. His help accessing the ATC population made this study possible. He is missed.

I would like to thank my committee members for their time, effort, and contributions to this project. Professors Donald Hunt and William Mason, with their roots based in aviation, offered me the benefit of their experienced perspective and insight.

To Professor Marvin Smith, my committee chairman, my sincere thanks for your leadership, guidance, and friendship. You made this project much more than solely a learning experience. I appreciate all you have done for me.

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ABSTRACT

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Institution: Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
Degree: Master of Aeronautical Science
Year: 1994

The purpose of this study was to assess the opinions, beliefs, and perspectives of former air traffic controllers who were terminated from employment with the Federal Aviation Administration for participating in the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike of 1981. The study examines the perceptions of the former controllers to determine their feelings toward the justification for going on strike over 13 years ago. This is relevant in light of recent events including the lifting of the ban against rehiring PATCO controllers by the Clinton Administration.

The data collected for this study were obtained with an opinionnaire mailed via a newsletter to former controllers who were members of the PATCO union. It was expected that a majority of the controllers would feel their actions of 1981 were justified. This feeling, however, would be mitigated by the fact that the controllers were terminated for their actions and sacrificed their careers with the decision to strike.
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<td>6</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TERMS

AFL - American Federation of Labor
ALPA - Air Line Pilots Association
ARTCC - Air Route Traffic Control Center
ATA - Air Transport Association
ATC - Air Traffic Control
ATCS - Air Traffic Control Specialist
CAA - Civil Aeronautics Authority
CERAPS - Combined Center and RAPCON
CIO - Committee on Industrial Organization
CIO - Congress of Industrial Organizations
FAA - Federal Aviation Administration
FAM - Familiarization (i.e., ATCS Access to air line cockpits for familiarization purposes)
FPL - Full Performance Level
IWW - International Workers of the World
KOL - Knights of Labor
MCA - Metropolitan Controllers Association
MEBA - Marine Engineer's Beneficial Association
NAGE - National Association of Government Workers
NATCA - National Air Traffic Controllers Association
NTSB - National Transportation Safety Board
OJT - On-The-Job-Training
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PATCO</td>
<td>Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAPCON</td>
<td>Radar Approach Control Facility (Military)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCABS</td>
<td>Derogatory term describing those who do not participate in a strike, as seen by those who do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprinters</td>
<td>In this case, those who ran back to the FAA when the 48 hour deadline was announced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRACAB</td>
<td>Terminal Radar Approach Control in Tower Cab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRACON</td>
<td>Terminal Radar Approach Control Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Association of workers to promote and protect the welfare, interests, and rights of its members, primarily through collective bargaining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VFR</td>
<td>Visual Flight Rules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

On August 3, 1981, a strike was called by the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) in an effort to seek concessions from the United States government. The strike resulted in the termination of nearly 12,000 air traffic control specialists and the decertification of the PATCO union.

Thirteen years have passed since the strike but questions still persist from the users of air traffic control services regarding the level to which the nation's air traffic control system has recovered. These questions are relevant in light of the fact that a new union, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA), has been formed. This retrospective analysis of controller's perceptions and opinions regarding the 1981 strike provides insight into the psychology of professionals willing to sacrifice their careers for a cause. Additionally, analysis of the data harvested in this study provides information which could be applied to future labor relations in negotiations where the prevention of a similar strike is of great social importance.
Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine, through an opinionnaire, the feelings of air traffic controllers who were terminated for their involvement in the PATCO strike of August 3, 1981. An evaluation of the fired controller's opinions will determine whether the strike was justified and worth the loss of their chosen careers.

Review of Related Literature

This study examines the perceptions of Air Traffic Controllers who were fired from their chosen profession for acting on the belief that, by uniting together in the withdrawal of their services from their employer, they could effect change. The controllers, like millions of other American workers, were members of a labor union. A labor union is described as "an association of workers to promote and protect the welfare, interests, and rights of its members, primarily by collective bargaining" (Websters, 1988, p. 1327).

To provide a background to the study, a brief review of the origins of organized labor in general and of the PATCO union in particular will be presented. Following this review, the circumstances and the atmosphere in which the PATCO strike of 1981 took place will be introduced. This approach is designed to illustrate the strike not as an arbitrary incident, but rather a culmination of events that arguably may have been patterned by union history.
Origins of organized labor in the United States.

The organization of labor in the United States began approximately two hundred years ago in the late 1700s. Then, as now, differences existed between employees and employers regarding work hours, wages, and complaints pertinent to particular vocations. The withdrawal of services from an employer by employees (striking) dates back to the late 1700s as well, as evidenced by the New York City Printers strike in 1794, the Cabinet Makers strike in 1796, the Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers (shoemakers) of Philadelphia, and the Pittsburgh Shoemakers who struck in 1809 (Mills, 1989).

In 1871, the Knights of Labor (KOL) emerged as a dominant force for labor. The KOL was notable as being among the first unions to exploit the effectiveness of political allies and was able to exert strong political influence during its relatively short twenty-two year lifespan. The KOL served as an example of how there can be strength in numbers, and demonstrated the importance of political support in achieving goals. The end of the KOL came about in 1893 due to a bombing during a radical rally which resulted in the deaths of seven police officers (Mills, 1989). Such acts of violence were commonplace during this period and were an unfortunate by-product of the growth of labor.

Following the KOL, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was established and it enjoyed much success in its organizing efforts through the years of World War I (WWI) and into 1920. The 1920s, however, were much less successful
years for unions in existence at that time. Early in the
decade there was a severe recession which weakened the unions
to a nearly ineffective state. As the economy rebounded and
eventually made a strong comeback, the unionization effort
was not able to keep pace. A causal factor for the slow
growth in union membership during this period was the onset
of mass production processes that used unskilled labor. This
class of employees, unlike the skilled tradespeople, was not
initially sought for membership as the unionization effort
got underway.

Another component of labor's growth was the introduction
of the Committee on Industrial Organization (CIO) in the
1930s. The CIO, with unexpected ease, was able to grasp
representation rights for the United States Steel
Corporation. Historically significant, this gain acted as a
catalyst to many other organizing victories, including one
with the Ford Motor Company. The CIO was bitterly opposed by
the Ford Company in its organizing bid of Ford, and was also
contested by the AFL in this effort. Its success, however,
firmly entrenched the CIO in the American labor mainstream.

By 1941, the CIO had organized the steel, auto, rubber,
and meat packing industries on a virtually exclusive
basis and was challenging the AFL in many other
industries. In the process the CIO had broken
completely with the AFL. In May 1938, the AFL expelled
the CIO unions from membership, and they established a
rival federation, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (also CIO), ... (Mills, 1989, p. 44).

It was clear at this point in the development of organized labor that not only were there rifts between employees and employers, but there were organizing rivalries among the major representative organizations as well. Both the AFL and the CIO were able to increase their numbers considerably during the years of World War II (WWII), but by 1943 the AFL had taken a substantial lead as shown in Table 1:

Table 1
Trade Union Membership (in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AFL</th>
<th>CIO</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>3045</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>3728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>3623</td>
<td>4038</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>8265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>4569</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>10,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>6564</td>
<td>5285</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td>13,642</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The AFL and the CIO were rival unions with different ideals. However, in 1952 the presidents of both unions passed away and were replaced by George Meany for the AFL and Walter P. Reuther for the CIO. Discussions had been taking place regarding a merger of the two unions, and now that there was a new leadership core, there remained little of the animosities and differences that had divided the two. The
AFL and the CIO merged in 1955 and became the huge private sector entity that people are familiar with today, the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO showed moderate growth through the 1960s but never again reached the levels witnessed in the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, the 1970s brought about a transition whereby the most growth was in the public sector which includes state, local and federal employees.

Origins of PATCO.

Among those public employees to become unionized in the 1960s and 1970s were the nation's air traffic controllers, who organized in 1968. The move to unionize followed years of controller complaints regarding staffing and equipment that had not received adequate administrative support.

The origins of today's air traffic control system date back to the early 1930s. Airlines at that time were concerned with the possibility that the growing number of aircraft filling the skies could become hazardous, and formed collaborations to share information regarding the positions of their aircraft. The involvement of the government began in 1934 when it implemented directional altitude separation standards. In 1936, a number of airlines further agreed to begin operating three experimental airway traffic control stations located in Newark, Chicago and Cleveland. Later that year the government became more deeply involved in air traffic when the Bureau of Air Commerce acquired the stations and forged the beginning of the federally managed air traffic control system.
The system developed slowly, with no major attempts at expansion until late in the 1940s when WWII came to an end. At that time there was a multitude of trained airmen returning to the country looking for employment flying for the airlines. The Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) then opened up funding for additional airway facilities and staffing, allowing air traffic growth and beginning the modern age of air travel and air traffic control (Shostak & Skocik, 1986).

The 1950s was an era of heavy airline growth that began to tax the budding air traffic system's capacity. Controllers were using equipment which was WWII vintage, taken from Air Force facilities and aircraft carriers. Controller complaints of the inadequacies of the equipment went essentially unanswered until 1956 when, in the course of two weeks, two avoidable air crashes claimed the lives of 202 people (Shostak & Skocik, 1986). The public was unaccustomed to hearing of such disasters, especially in an expanding new industry like aviation. In 1958 the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) was created, assuming the responsibilities held by the CAA. At this point there were nearly 13,000 controllers in the workplace. While some improvements were made, system failures remained evident. Attention was focused on the FAA in 1963 when a major midair collision occurred, publicly exposing some of the failings of the FAA. According to Shostak & Skocik (1986), what came to light was a controller workforce that in 1963 was very disillusioned. There had
been no new hires added to the system since 1961 and controllers were being forced, under the threat of dismissal, to work eight to ten hour days, six days a week. Additional problems affecting the controllers were the lack of any notice being given when enforcing the overtime mandate, the use of much of the same "archaic" equipment, and the tendency to attach blame for an aviation accident or incident to the controller rather than to admit to a problem that may discredit the system. These growing signs of antagonism were beginning to manifest themselves in an adversarial relationship between the controllers and the FAA management.

In 1962 President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988 permitting unions to organize in the public sector and obliging federal agencies to negotiate with these unions in a responsible manner. A stipulation of this order was that the unions involved in public sector negotiations could not bargain over wages, hours, insurance, retirement, or other like matters that fell under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Commission, requiring Congressional action in order to be changed. The National Association of Government Employees (NAGE) was one of the first federal employee associations organized, and they extended invitations to various air traffic facility locals to join. Many locals did join, but by doing so they handicapped themselves by being independent of other facilities, and due to their isolation were unable to effect substantive gains.
In 1967, controllers at the Chicago O'Hare facility had become disgruntled over the staffing and mandatory overtime issues. When agreements reached on a regional level were denied by the FAA, the O'Hare controllers enacted a "rule book" job action (A "rule book" job action means that a controller, in performing his/her duties, would control traffic precisely by FAA procedures. The many methods commonly used by controllers to expedite the flow of air traffic are not employed.). Because O'Hare is one of the busiest traffic centers in the country, the job action taken there had a tremendous affect and snarled air traffic throughout the country. The FAA acquiesced and almost immediately agreed to annual increases of $1,100 per controller, attributing the increase only to the cost of living in the area, and vowed that like increases would not be made elsewhere (Shostak & Skocik, 1986). Other heavy volume facilities soon followed suit in asking for increases and in some cases, like Los Angeles, were successful. These successes were small and local in nature, and the realization that a consolidated approach to representation would be required began to receive support.

A group of controllers from a newly formed organization, the Metropolitan Controllers Association (MCA) representing controllers from Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Newark and Philadelphia, determined that in order to begin an association with national potential, there would have to be a key person to serve as a catalyst in getting the organization
off the ground. The person chosen to fill this role and lead
the newly formed organization was F. Lee Bailey, a renowned
attorney with a proven history of accomplishments. Mr.
Bailey was approached on January 4, 1968, with the
controllers proposal. He accepted, with the fee for his
services set at $100.00, plus expenses, for a period of six
months (Shostak & Skocik, 1986).

The first organizational meeting called by Bailey was
expected to draw approximately 100 controllers. Instead, a
crowd of more than 600 controllers plus 100 of their spouses
from 22 states showed up. They listened to Bailey in a two
hour speech termed as "spellbinding" that was recorded and
made available for playback to controllers in all 50 states.
Within one month the new organization had enlisted over 4,000
controllers and the Professional Air Traffic Controllers
Organization was born (Shostak & Skocik, 1986).

Events culminating in the 1981 PATCO strike.

The name PATCO was purposely chosen to depict a
professional association rather than a labor union (Shostak &
Skocik, 1986). The first year of PATCO saw the adoption of
its constitution and its first attempt at reaching a
collective bargaining agreement with the FAA. F. Lee Bailey
made an agreement that addressed controller concerns over
wage reclassification, reopening of the air traffic
controller training academy, and controller exemption from
civil service regulations as they applied to other public
workers because of the unique nature of the air traffic
control profession. This hand-shake agreement, according to Shostak & Skocik (1986) was between honorable gentlemen that, despite the urging of other members of PATCO's leadership, was not put into writing. Subsequently, the agreement was not honored by the FAA and because of this perceived failure, Bailey's reputation among the controllers was tarnished. Meanwhile, as PATCO struggled to become a viable representative for the controllers, a task force had been commissioned during 1968 to look into air traffic controller grievances. The findings of the task force were released in 1970 and supported the controller's claims that their profession required more of them than those of most federal employees. Reforms recommended to the FAA included a sharp reduction in work hours, the upgrading of equipment and facilities, the reduction of required overtime, the expansion of intervals between shift rotations, the revision of pay criteria, and that negotiations should take place (Shostak & Skocik, 1986).

PATCO faced a severe challenge to its existence in 1970 when the FAA chose to relocate four active PATCO members from their Baton Rouge facility against their will. PATCO's threatened sickout to protest the forced moves resulted in another negotiating session involving F. Lee Bailey and FAA management. Bailey worked out an agreement that other PATCO leaders, remembering the first failed attempt, demanded its negotiated terms be committed to writing. Bailey, convinced he had received appropriate assurances, did not heed the
demand and settled for a gentlemen's agreement for the second time (Shostak & Skocik, 1986). Once again, the FAA did not honor the terms agreed to with the controllers, this time resulting in a sickout that had nearly 3,000 participants. This action brought a severe response by the FAA, including the withholding of pay from controllers who called in sick and the issuing of subpoenas to each participating member. PATCO countered by enlisting the services of 50 attorneys to represent the controllers. The move to secure legal representation resulted in the nearly instantaneous bankruptcy of the union. Also, happening concurrently, was the filing of a lawsuit by the Air Transport Association (ATA) seeking $100 million because of losses it was suffering due to the decrease in air traffic services. Faced with overwhelming opposition and threats of his personal disbarment, F. Lee Bailey went on television, and under duress, called off the sickout (Shostak & Skocik, 1986). A federal judge involved with the case ruled that if PATCO ever "struck" again, it would be subject to fines of $25,000 or more to be paid to the ATA. The 'or more' portion of the previous sentence was to play an important role in the ultimate undoing of PATCO when the strike of 1981 happened and the government attached the contingency fund of nearly $3.5 million held by the union.

Differences between PATCO and the FAA continued through the 1970s while PATCO was under the leadership of John Leyden. The decade was one of controversy for PATCO,
beginning with the resignation of F. Lee Bailey and ending with the replacement of Leyden in 1980. The departures of each of these leaders were emotionally charged and signaled directional changes for PATCO. Bailey resigned in June of 1970, shortly after Leyden was chosen to lead the controllers. His leaving marked the end of the involvement of "non-controllers" in the determination of PATCO's future. The direction PATCO took in 1970 was toward that of a labor union rather than strictly that of a professional association. Through an affiliation with the Marine Engineer's Beneficial Association (MEBA), PATCO gained the alliance of a politically powerful association of professional workers as well as recognition as a labor union. With the MEBA affiliation, PATCO also acquired the insight and advise of Jesse Calhoun, the well respected leader of MEBA. PATCO, with assistance from MEBA, was soon able to become politically active and began its lobbying efforts with the endorsement of Richard Nixon for President in 1972.

Nixon was successful in his bid for office and, in 1973, PATCO entered its first contractual negotiations with the FAA with the hopes of having a friend in the White House. With a membership of approximately 8,500 controllers, PATCO was only mildly optimistic as negotiations began. Optimism turned to elation when the union completed its first contract agreement and came away with what was felt to be a "first-ever contract more generous than the union had dared hope" (Shostak & Skocik, 1986, p. 63). As Leyden presided through the second
contract and into the third, it was beginning to become apparent that the "no-strike" clause which ultimately governed the response of government employees was adversely affecting the union's ability to negotiate. "By-the-book slowdowns" and controller "sick-outs" were the typical weapons employed when negotiating impasses were encountered. Occasionally, concessions sought by the union did not benefit all members within the union, and the effectiveness of these tactics was compromised when membership support was not sufficiently responsive.

Included in the third contract was an expansion of Familiarization (FAM) privileges to international flights (FAM is the term used referring to the ability of a controller to fly in air carrier cockpits as an observer for the purpose of becoming better acquainted with pilot responsibilities.). This benefit was viewed by some air carriers as merely a perk and a number of them refused to honor the FAM flight requests. Seeing the FAM flights as the only gain of substance in 1978, Leyden tried to fight the denial of these flights by threatening an air traffic slowdown. Many of the controllers, however, did not see the FAM flights as a benefit worth initiating a job action for. Leyden continued his opposition to the cutting out of the FAM flights on the basis of the effect that conceding an already negotiated item would have on future contract negotiations. Leyden called for and got a slowdown to protest the reduction but the slowdown was not well supported and proved to be
ineffective. This issue, together with other problems facing PATCO such as wage classifications, controller stress rulings by the FAA, a second career training program, and in-house controller discontent, served to weaken Leyden's position as the union's leader. According to Shostak & Skocik (1986), the executive board of PATCO began to doubt whether Leyden's continued role as the leader of PATCO was in PATCO's best interest. The internal dissension continued through 1978 and 1979 and into the election period of 1980 when Leyden was opposed by his Executive Vice President, Robert E. Poli. At a controversial meeting in January of 1980, both Poli and Leyden offered their resignations to the board. The board took a vote and in a 6 to 1 decision agreed to accept the resignation of Leyden and to ask Poli to remain as the new union president.

Poli's presidency was to last only two years, but those two years were steeped in a new resolve and commitment to unity by the controller workforce. PATCO began to move more blatantly towards a showdown with the FAA. Rhetoric from both sides intensified while contract talks faltered. In October of 1980, Poli announced that PATCO would support Ronald Reagan for President. In return, Poli received a letter from Reagan which reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Poli,

I have been thoroughly briefed by members of my staff as to the deplorable state of our nation's air traffic control system. They have told me that too few
people working unreasonable hours with obsolete equipment has placed the nation's air travelers in unwarranted danger. In an area so clearly related to public safety, the Carter Administration has failed to act reasonably.

You can rest assured that if I am elected President, I will take whatever steps are necessary to provide our air traffic controllers with the most modern equipment available, and to adjust staff levels and workdays so they are commensurate with achieving the maximum degree of public safety.

As in all areas of the federal government where the President has the power of appointment, I fully intend to appoint highly qualified individuals who can work harmoniously with Congress and the employees of government agencies they oversee.

I pledge to you that my administration will work very closely with you to bring about a spirit of cooperation between the President and the air traffic controllers. Such harmony can and must exist if we are to restore the people's confidence in the government.

Sincerely,

Ronald Reagan

(Personal Correspondence, 1979)

This letter served to bolster the confidence of the controllers and their leadership in the belief that their's
was a reasonable position that would have support from the highest level of government if Reagan were President.

Poli had a list of 96 demands that were brought to the bargaining table. Of those, there were three that, according to Shostak & Skocik (1986) were revealed by controller questionnaires to be of the most concern. The other demands served to emphasize that there was much that would still need to be addressed. The three most significant concerns were those of salary gains, reduced work hours, and retirement aid. While progress was made on a number of issues, negotiating impasses remained. After many months of talks without an agreement and an already expired contract, the FAA was given notice by Poli that PATCO intended to begin a work stoppage on August 3, 1981, if a settlement could not be reached. Unfortunately, the talks did not produce an agreement between the parties and at 7:00 am on August 3, 1981, nearly 13,000 controllers walked away from their positions, beginning an illegal strike.

Many controllers felt that President Reagan would intervene in a way that would, because of his pledge, settle the dispute in an amiable way. Instead, Reagan issued an ultimatum to the controllers that if they did not return to their positions within a 48 hour period, they would be terminated. The controllers held steadfastly to their picket lines, and subsequently, the vast majority of the nation's controller workforce was fired. The strike also resulted in the bankruptcy of the union, the banning for life of its
members from working for the FAA as Air Traffic Controllers, and the ultimate destruction of the union through decertification efforts initiated by the government.

**Post Strike.**

In 1989, approximately 5,000 working controllers responded to a questionnaire, with a majority of respondents stating that although the system remains safe, staffing is less than normal while the workload is often too heavy (Mead, 1989). The goal for controller staffing has been set at 18,300 (Anderson, 1991). Thanepohn (1991) has determined the 1991 staffing level of air traffic controllers stood at 17,284, of which 10,776 were considered full performance level (FPL), meaning they are certified to work at any position within a facility. These figures compare to 16,200 controllers in 1981, and of that number, 13,205 were FPL controllers. These numbers represent a shortfall of nearly 2,500 FPL controllers although the total number of controllers is more than 1,000 greater than in 1981. Staffing figures for the controller work force are also affected by problems in the way the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) determines who controllers are, "These problems stem primarily from including persons who do not control air traffic in the controller work force and excluding others who do" (Peach, 1987, p. 1).

The Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) has shown concern that the level of FPL controllers is inadequate, given a 30% rise in air traffic volume over the past ten years. ALPA's
position had been one of reluctance to see fired controllers return to work. Now, ALPA cites that the 500-700 PATCO controllers who had returned to work through arbitration took no more than one year to reach the FPL level. ALPA also feels that enough of a penalty has been paid by fired controllers and they should be allowed the opportunity to reapply for their positions (Essler, 1991). In 1986, opinions were sought from working controllers and fired controllers regarding the rehiring issue. At that time, 57% of controllers working at the time of the strike and 69% of those hired since the strike opposed rehiring fired controllers, while 90% of the fired controllers responded that they would return to their positions if allowed (Mclure, 1986).

Since that time, many of the working controller's opinions have changed to such a degree that NATCA called for the lifting of the ban on fired controllers at a convention in 1990 in a resolution directed to President Bush (Anderson, 1990). NATCA had recently gone through its second election wherein Steve Bell was replaced by Barry Krasner as president, and Ray Spickler was replaced by Joe Bellino as vice president. This new leadership took its election as a mandate from the rank and file members to become more aggressive in their dealings with the Federal Aviation Administration (Ott, 1991). A prelude to this renewed increase in activism was the 1990 protest at the Washington Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) where picketing took
place to protest the lack of improvement since the strike, especially in the area of FPL controller staffing (Thanepohn, 1991). Another example of controller dissatisfaction in working conditions was displayed when viewpoints were solicited from center controllers in the Chicago area (Mead, 1989a). Additionally, a follow up to a 1985 survey was taken in 1988 to gauge changes in attitudes, "The 1988 perceptions of controllers, supervisors, and managers show little change since our 1985 survey. Whatever changes the FAA has made over the years, little overall movement in work force attitude has occurred." (Mead, 1989b, p. 9).

The concerns of safety advocates such as the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) match those of NATCA, ALPA, and the FAA in what has been more than 13 years of debate regarding the safety, efficiency, and competence of the air traffic system. Training, automation, and equipment maintenance are among concerns affecting the controller's ability to perform. Training is costly and time consuming, with the screening phase at the Oklahoma training facility producing up to a 50% dropout rate. Steps are being implemented to shorten the selection time to five days or less in an effort to save time and money (Mead, 1990). Simulator training is being considered as a way to save money and relieve controllers from on-the-job training (OJT) responsibilities of new-hires (Carrigan, Eggenberger, & Gerstenfeld, 1992). Automation has encountered numerous delays in reaching its potential for controllers. Systems
proposed to be on-line in the late 1980s have yet to be installed, and according to Carlone (1990), the FAA may not have the required resources in terms of hardware and software in time to meet the increased demand on air traffic capabilities for the 1990s. Equipment maintenance problems account for 2% of the delays in the air traffic system. These problems were expected to be reduced with the advent of new equipment, however, equipment arrival delays have forced the FAA to re-think its position on maintenance staffing. The FAA had been relying on less demand for maintenance personnel by using highly efficient equipment in a plan to reduce the maintenance work force through attrition. Because the equipment has not been available, however, the FAA has found that there is now a shortage of these personnel. In order to keep pace with the demand on the system, the FAA is using increased overtime, incentives, and contractor services to help bolster the work force (Peach, 1991).

Summary of Literature Review.

The voices of those most affected by the strike, the fired controllers, have been relatively quiet during this 13 year period. Given the condition of today's air traffic system and the fact that President Clinton lifted the ban on rehiring fired controllers, it is timely to examine the general perceptions of the terminated controllers regarding the actions they took at the time of the strike to determine if they see similar problems in today's air traffic control system. Bill Taylor, of "PATCO Lives", a support group and
publication for fired controllers, referring to the protest at the Washington Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) stated, "I felt compassion for them, because the system has come full circle. I thought of the irony of it and how well it proves that the issues of the strike have never been resolved" (Thanepohn, 1991, p. 23).

Statement of the Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the beliefs, opinions, and perceptions of former PATCO members will suggest many of the key issues that led to the strike in 1981 are still unresolved and are, therefore, potential threats to the quality, safety, and efficiency of the current air traffic control system. Further, because of these beliefs and perceptions, the fired controllers will feel continued justification in their actions of 1981 although mitigated by the loss of their chosen career.
CHAPTER 2
Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were derived from a population consisting of approximately 12,000 air traffic controllers who were terminated from their jobs for participating in a strike on August 3, 1981. The sample is comprised of former air traffic specialists who are members of PATCO Lives. PATCO Lives is an advocacy organization formed by fired controllers and their supporters shortly after the decertification and bankruptcy of the PATCO union. PATCO Lives is the only remaining cohesive link to the fired controller workforce and uses recorded phone messages and a newsletter to communicate with its nearly 3,000 members. The sample includes 380 respondents and represents a diverse segment of the total population of fired PATCO air traffic controllers.

Instrument

The instrument for this study is a questionnaire designed by the researcher to gauge respondent's opinions in a quantitative manner while allowing commentary input for supplemental analysis. This instrument, containing two parts, is designed to sample only air traffic controllers who
were terminated from employment with the Federal Aviation Administration for participating in an illegal strike. Part 1 is designed to gather demographic data while the second part provides information which permits evaluation of respondent's opinions through a structured question format. Space for respondent's comments provides for additional information to be used in analyzing generalizations relevant to the sample.

The instrument was administered through the use of a mailing to the subjects. Scoring of the data in this study requires simple statistical processing by percentage value to apply the data from the sample to the population for quantitative results. Interpretation of comments harvested through this survey was completed by the researcher and reviewed by Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University faculty familiar with air traffic control and the situation at the time of the strike.

Design

The research for this study concentrates on the opinions of a sample of former air traffic controllers taken from a population of those controllers terminated from their positions in 1981 for participating in an illegal strike. The most appropriate way to accomplish this research is the descriptive method as depicted in the textbook, *Educational Research*, by Gay (1992). Chosen for its emphasis on the current status of the subjects and the opinionnaire data collection method, the descriptive method allows for a
comprehensive compilation and analysis of data which is best suited to determining a true consensus of controller opinions. The historical method described in this textbook, *Educational Research*, by Gay (1992), is used to provide an account of the pre-strike circumstances contributing to the breakdown of negotiations and the onset of the strike. Use of the correlational method, also outlined in the textbook *Educational Research*, by Gay (1992), provides the researcher with data upon which pertinent conclusions regarding fired controller attitudes may be drawn.

**Procedures**

To begin this study, the researcher presents a historical overview of the development of American unionism followed by the origin and growth of the PATCO union. The purpose of this information is to provide the reader with an understanding of the events leading to this study. The study investigates the attitudes of the air traffic controllers who were terminated for participating in the PATCO strike of 1981.

The sample is taken from the population of fired air traffic controllers who are members of, or accessible by, PATCO Lives. The sample consists of approximately 10% of the target population which is an acceptable sample size. The sample was obtained through a newsletter mailing provided by PATCO Lives, a support group for fired controllers, and the only remaining link to the fired controller population.
The instrument, designed by the researcher for this study, consists of an opinionnaire and a statement to respondents requesting they complete and return the opinionnaire. The opinionnaire is in two parts, with five demographically oriented questions in the first part and nine structured questions for quantitative analysis in the second part. Available commentary space allows increased qualitative analysis of the data in the second part. The opinionnaire provides instructions for completion, assurance of anonymity, and a request for response within 14 days. There was no pretest, and because the instrument is unique to this study, it was not pre-validated. To ensure content validity, the researcher solicited a former controller to review and critique the instrument.
CHAPTER 3
Analysis

Opinionnaire Part 1 - Demographic Analysis

The questions in Part 1 of the opinionnaire (Appendix J), with the exception of question 5, were designed to present results in an illustrative manner. This demographic data provides information which allows the reader to envision the comprehensive depth of the sample in terms relative to the responses given to the structured questions in Part 2 of the opinionnaire. Review of the demographic and occupational data in Part 1 also provides the reader, who may or may not be familiar with the breadth of the PATCO strike, a basis of understanding regarding the scope of this national strike and its participants. The questions in Part 1 deal with the longevity, facility level, facility type, and facility location of the respondent at the time of the strike. Additionally, the respondent's employment status was included in the responses.

1. How long were you employed by the Federal Aviation Administration as an air traffic control specialist?

Question 1, Part 1, asks how long the respondent was employed by the FAA. The results of this question are shown in graph form in Figure 1. In analyzing these results, a
Figure 1. Part 1, Question 1. How long were you employed by the Federal Aviation Administration as an air traffic control specialist?

clear majority is evident in the combined time frames of 5-10 years and 10-15 years. These two time frames comprise nearly 70% of the entire sample. This information is significant, in that it represents the most experienced segment of the air traffic control system in 1981. While it is recognized that individuals progress in training at varying speeds, the typical advancement of a controller from a newly hired developmental to a full performance level (FPL) controller requires approximately three to five years. The time to reach FPL is longer in complex facilities consisting of many positions at which the controller must become proficient. The 69.6% of the sample represented by the 5-10 and 10-15 year categories represents a highly experienced contingent of former controllers.

The former controllers represented by the three remaining time frames are divided nearly equally above and
below the majority segments with 14.2% in the 0-5 year
category and 16.2% in the combined 15-20 year and "other"
category. The "other" category consists of those controllers
who had more than twenty years of service with the FAA. It
is of interest to note that the respondent with the most
years service had been employed by the FAA for twenty-seven
years as an Air Traffic Controller.

In terms of controller expertise, this question clearly
shows that the vast majority of respondents had five or more
years experience, with only 14.2% having less. Indeed, 54.3%
of all respondents had ten or more years experience
controlling air traffic.

2. **What level of facility were you assigned to at the time
of the strike?**

Question 2, Part 1, asks what level facility the
respondent was assigned to at the time of the strike. Air
traffic facilities are rated according to the density and
complexity of the air traffic handled, on a scale of one to
five. A level 1 facility, as an example, is typically a non-
radar, VFR (visual flight rules) control tower which is
minimally staffed and has relatively few aircraft operations.
Many of these facilities have, since the strike, been given
by the FAA via contract to private air traffic companies in
an attempt to make better use of the limited supply of
personnel resources. Those controllers involved were moved
to busier sites to help bolster staffing deficiencies left by
the strike.
Level 2, 3 and 4 facilities carry increasing degrees of complexity and traffic density, and include facilities such as busier towers controlling non-radar approaches, radar approach control facilities (RAPCONS), and terminal radar approach control facilities (TRACONS). A level 5 facility is responsible for the most complex and heavy air traffic and is usually reserved for air route traffic control centers (ARTCC) and TRACONS such as those located at large metropolitan airports. The level associated with each facility is designated by the FAA and is also used as a criteria which determines the pay levels attainable by employees, according to government pay grades (i.e., a GS-7 pay grade for a level one facility versus a GS-14 pay grade for a level 5 facility).

The graph in Figure 2 shows very similar percentage values associated with the level 3, 4, and 5 facilities, while the level 1 and 2 facilities are likewise similar, albeit approximately 10% less than the level 3, 4, and 5. The result for the level 1 and 2 facilities was expected to be proportionately lower, as it is, due to the lesser manpower requirements connected to the facility size. These results, together with the results for the level 3, 4, and 5 facilities demonstrate, by their parity, an excellent cross section of former controllers by facility level is represented by the sample. The 15.5% of respondents in the "other" category are those former controllers who could not recall at what level their facility was designated. Of those
respondents who could not recall which rating their facility held, the majority indicated they were assigned to an ARTCC, or to a facility which was deemed to be among the busiest. Some were confused as to whether a level 1 or a level 5 facility was rated busiest. Assumptions were not made on this point, thus accounting for the 15.5% figure. It could be reasonably expected, however, according to the respondent's comments, that the 15.5% would follow the same pattern as the 3, 4, and 5 facilities, with a possible slant toward the facilities rated at level 4 and 5.

3. **What type of facility were you assigned to?**

Question 3, Part 1, inquired as to the type facility the respondent was working in prior to the 1981 strike. The three most common facility types include control towers, TRACONS, and ARTCCS (referred to as centers). While 97.1% of
Figure 3. Part 1, Question 3. What type of facility were you assigned to?

The sample responded within these three categories, there remained 2.9% who were associated with facility types such as United States Armed Forces Radar Approach Control Facilities (RAPCONS), Terminal Radar Approach Control In Tower Cab (TRACABS), and Combined Center-RAPCON (CERAPS), see Figure 3.

The results of this demographic question serve to reaffirm the validity of the comprehensive nature of the sample. There is a 3.4% difference in the pie graph segments of Figure 3 representing TRACONS and centers, proving analogous to the results of Question 2 in Part 1 regarding levels 3, 4, and 5 facilities. Tower facilities are represented by 21% of the sample which is comparable to the Level 1 and 2 facilities of Question 2 in Part 1 of the opinionnaire, accounting for 19.8% of the sample. Again, most typical Level 1 and 2 towers are staffed with a minimum number of controllers, and the disparity between the 21%
segment shown in Figure 3 and those representing TRACONS and centers is attributable to this lesser staffing requirement.

4. **In which state was the facility located?**

The information obtained from Question 4 of Part 1 of the opinionnaire lends further credence in assuring the sample is representative of a comprehensive, yet diverse cross section of the population of former air traffic controllers. As shown by the map depicted in Figure 4, it is readily apparent that nearly every state in the country is represented by the sample.

The map in Figure 4 also indicates where concentrations of former controllers may be found. These areas are evident in two ways. First, it would appear that the larger and more populous states have the greatest number of respondents. States like Texas, New York, California, and Florida are examples of large, heavily populated states. While this is true to a certain degree, another factor relative to concentrated pockets of former controllers would be the locations of ARTCC facilities. Included are states like New Hampshire, Ohio, Colorado, and Minnesota with comparatively high numbers of respondents. One may see a correlation between the two, but not all the states having ARTCCs are necessarily heavily populated ones.

The demographic information provided by the first four questions in Part 1 of the opinionnaire is of importance to the results of this study. The intent of the study is to
determine a consensus opinion of fired air traffic controllers. To do so requires a sample truly representative of the population of those controllers fired from their profession. These demographic questions were designed as a method of validating that the sample being used is comprised of respondents whose responses would not be skewed by the parameters of longevity, facility level, facility type, or geographic location.

All four questions, when taken individually, instill a degree of confidence in the validity of the sample. When they are considered collectively, however, there is no doubt that the sample is well rounded and an exemplar of the population. Had any of the four questions revealed an obvious and unqualified disparity in its results, such as all
responding controllers being from the same geographic region, or all from the same type facility, the conclusions of this study may have been compromised by that bias toward only a very particular portion of the population. If this were the case, that circumstance might have rendered continuation of the study suspect to critical analysis. The sample does, however, prove to be valid by the parameters of the questions in Part 1 of the opinionnaire. Also, as mentioned earlier, this information additionally serves to provide the reader with a basis of understanding regarding the breadth of those individuals involved in the 1981 strike.

5. **What is your current occupation?**

Contributing to the reader's perception of those controllers involved in the strike are the results taken from Question 5 of Part 1 which asks the current occupation of the respondent. This question is relevant in a number of ways. For example, the positions held now by the former controllers may be indicative of the type of positions expected to be attainable by the FAA controllers currently working who lose their jobs by medical disqualification or other reasons. The positions now being held by former controllers also allow conclusions to be drawn regarding how the skills of an air traffic control specialist do, or do not, transfer to the private sector.

Appendix K lists many of the occupations the former controllers were involved with at the time the opinionnaire
was disseminated. For the purpose of this study, the occupations were categorized, to the extent possible, to be compared to those which were solicited in a 1984 study by Steven O'Keefe. By approaching the question in this manner, it is possible to see if there were any progressive or regressive trends in the employment of the former controllers. The eight categories used by O'Keefe and their corresponding values are shown in Table 2.

The occupations exhibiting the greatest change since the 1984 study are the 11.7% increase in the "Professional" category and the 9.6% decrease in the "Sales" category. It should be noted at this point, that the comparisons and conclusions regarding the information in Table 2 cannot be

Table 2.

Occupations Held by Former Controllers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>+11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>+ 2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>- 9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>- 8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Employed</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>- 2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Collar</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>+ 5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATC Here and Abroad</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>- 3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>+ 1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
qualified scientifically in this study due to the fact that the sample used in the O'Keefe study was not available for use and is therefore not known to the researcher beyond its results. The information is relative, however, and does indicate that generally the former controllers appear to be making progress in advancing in their new vocations. For example, the percentage of those in sales positions following the strike may indicate that sales was one of the areas where jobs were more obtainable at the onset of the strike. Since the strike was more than 13 years ago and many controllers are now involved in completely new endeavors, the increase in the "Professional" and "Management" categories would, as in normal career development, indicate expected advancement over an extended period of time.

The variance in the White Collar and Blue Collar categories suggest a generic shift in the workforce prevalent in recent years where focus has been placed on downsizing, restructuring, and reductions in the ranks of middle management. The decreases in the categories of "Self Employed" and "ATC Here and Abroad" are small and do not appear to be significant. Similarly, the 2.4% increase in the "Unemployed" category, while not significantly large, may be due to the economic recession experienced in the past few years. Again, while not entirely scientific in nature, this information is generally acceptable and is presented to further appraise the reader of characteristics of the sample prior to the analysis of the questions in Part 2 of
the opinionnaire.

Opinionnaire Part 2 - Quantitative/Qualitative Analysis

The questions in Part 2 of the opinionnaire, with the exception of Question 9, were designed in a manner allowing the respondent to provide concise, quantifiable responses. In addition, each question offered space for the respondent to comment on his/her answer. This feature was the vehicle that furnished qualifiable information pertaining to the consensus sentiment of the sample. Question 9 was not a quantifiable question, but did solicit a qualifiable answer regarding concerns the respondents may have in returning to the ATC profession.

The results of Part 2 of the opinionnaire are presented in two ways. The first relates the findings of the quantifiable portion of the question. This is accomplished by percentage values depicted in bar graph form, providing consistency as well as ease in visual discernment for the reader. The second way the results are presented is by relating a compilation of the qualifiable information taken from the comment section of the respondent's answers. Determination of the responses of greatest frequency and commonality within each question enables a complementary perspective to be developed. This perspective is crucial in ascertaining beliefs truly representative of the sample. Quoted examples of responses made by the former controllers for each question are highlighted in Appendices A through I.
1. **When the strike began, did you feel it was a justifiable cause?**

   Based on the fact that this question was asked of people who went out on strike, remained on strike in the face of a presidential ultimatum, and were subsequently fired, it was expected that a majority of respondents would reply in the affirmative. While the majority did reply as expected, see Figure 5, an underlying intent of the question was to gauge the level of respondents who answered in the negative and determine the reasons behind their decision to participate in the strike. As Figure 5 shows, 87% of respondents answered YES, 12% answered NO, and less than 1% did not respond.

   The 87% that answered YES cited a variety of reasons to support the position they took. The issues of equipment, safety, and staffing were predominant, while secondary issues such as the feeling that there was no choice but to strike and union loyalty also impacted the controllers' decisions. In justifying the "No Choice" response, comments included fears of the lack of long term survivability working as an air traffic controller, a belief that there had been a "set-up" on the part of the FAA to destroy the union, and the belief that the FAA did not negotiate in good faith, thereby forcing the strike to happen. Regarding union loyalty, it is of interest to note that there were very few comments from controllers claiming peer pressure as a reason for participating in the strike. Others who had answered YES to this question expressed their feelings that the
methodology chosen by PATCO to fight the FAA by striking was wrong, as was the time chosen to enact it. Although they harbored misgivings, these controllers nonetheless went on strike in support of their union and co-workers.

Of the 12% of the respondents who answered in the negative, nine stated that they had no reason to go on strike, believing things were good for them as they were. Some of these people went out on strike in support of the union, but expressed reservations or fear of reprisal if they had not. The fear refers to the idea that, if the strike had been successful, the union or individuals within the union would retaliate against a member who did not support the strike effort. It is of importance to realize that, in air traffic control, controllers are responsible for the on-the-job training of other controllers. The potential exists for a controller holding ill will towards another controller to
seriously impede the training and progressive checkout of that person through the various positions within a facility. Checking out at all required positions is the way controllers advance to the full performance level at a given facility. If a controller is found to be unable to qualify for the positions at his/her facility, consequences may include delays in monetary upgrades, reassignment to a lesser facility, or in worst case scenarios, the potential for dismissal.

The 12% figure attached to the negative answers represents the opinions of 46 controllers out of the sample of 380. In addition to the reasons mentioned, some fired controllers stated their discomfort with the legal issue of striking against the U. S. Government and breaking a personal oath. Others felt they had been misinformed and/or misled by either the FAA or the PATCO union and may have acted differently if they had been better appraised of all the circumstances involved. Another sentiment expressed was for alternative actions to the strike, similar to the slowdowns and sickouts PATCO had effectively employed in the past.

There were a multitude of individual feelings, the most common of which have been discussed above. A point of interest worth noting is, when the strike began, much attention had been given to the union demand of a $10,000 raise. Of the responses received, there was a negligible number of respondents who named money as a concern. The issues of inadequate equipment and related safety problems
are indicated by the respondents as having been the paramount concerns for them in determining their decision to strike was a justifiable cause.

2. **In retrospect, do you now feel the strike was justified?**

This question serves as the primary focus of this study in determining the correctness of the hypothesis. The hypothesis states that there would be a continued feeling of justification on the part of the fired controllers for their actions in 1981, however, their perceptions of justification would be mitigated by the losses they suffered. Figure 6 clearly indicates, after more than 13 years, the fired controllers maintain a conviction of justification in their decision to participate in the PATCO strike. The percentage of controllers who answered in the negative supports, in part, expectations that their belief the strike was justified is mitigated by their losses. The comments made by the former controllers further enhance the premise of their sense of loss.

A comparison between Figure 5 and Figure 6 reflects nearly a 16% increase in those controllers who, in retrospect, do not feel the PATCO strike was justified. The number of respondents who answered NO to this question is 106. Some of the more common responses of those controllers included twenty-one who stated that, in hindsight, they no longer felt their actions were justified, seven who felt they had been misled into striking, six who
felt their efforts had been in vain, and five who believed the financial and emotional costs had been too high.

The respondents who answered YES, in many cases, did so emphatically using terms such as "absolutely", "100%", and "Now more than ever!". Twenty-one indicated they still felt complete justification in what they did. Eight respondents believed there was no choice except to strike, five related that what they knew to be legally wrong, was the morally right thing to do, and three others termed the strike a set-up. Again, as in the first question of this part of the study, there were numerous other responses expressing personal thoughts and emotions.

One of the more common responses received on both sides of this question stated the PATCO controllers wish that things had been done differently, with emphasis on the point that they should have stayed on the job and attempted to
change conditions from within. The responses generally conveyed a feeling of pride the former controllers had in their conviction to support what they believed in regardless of the subsequent personal losses experienced. The losses extend beyond the obvious loss of a career to include long term friendships with controllers who opted not to strike, deaths of fellow strikers by suicide, the loss of family because of divorces induced by strike related stress, and job skills which have few private sector applications. These examples and others the respondents express throughout Part 2 of the opinionnaire are representative of some of the burdens the fired controllers feel they have been forced to bear since the onset of the strike.

3. Do you feel the government had any viable alternative to terminating you after the 48 hour return to work ultimatum was issued?

The responses received for this question indicate an indomitable belief on the part of the fired controllers that the strike could have been averted had alternative opportunities been pursued by the government. As the graph in Figure 7 illustrates, 85.5% of the PATCO controllers felt the government had choices available short of terminating their employment. The response most frequently cited communicated the idea that the fired controllers believed the government should have negotiated in good faith. This particular response represented the opinions of 17.9% of the respondents. This response, when considered conversely,
implies the former controllers feel the government failed to negotiate in good faith throughout the talks leading to the strike.

Of the other responses pertaining to the YES side of this question, two had relatively high frequencies. The first being that both sides should have submitted to binding arbitration to settle the unresolved issues. These respondents felt that a mediator, holding no bias towards either side, would have presented the best opportunity for a resolution acceptable to both parties. The second response advocated a cooling off period to allow the tension of the strike to subside and cooler heads to prevail.

Another commonly echoed sentiment was that the 48 hour ultimatum issued by President Reagan was inappropriate given the gravity of the situation the strike presented, and the consequences that eventually came from it. Additional alternatives recommended by the respondents included the possibilities of suspensions without pay and/or the levying of fines.

The PATCO controllers also believe they were wrongly denied the opportunity to reapply for their positions after a three year penalty, prescribed by law, had expired. They felt the refusal to accept applications after the three years had passed added a vindictive quality to the ultimatum which stated the controllers would never be allowed to work for the FAA as controller specialists again. Typically, a
person terminated from a governmental position has the right to be reconsidered for that position after a three year period has passed, but President Reagan chose at the time to disqualify the controllers from working air traffic control for the FAA for life. There is, concurrent with the compilation of this study, a court case addressing the issue of the three year rule. Fired controllers who attempted to reapply after the three year period ended in 1984, together with the others who did not, are represented in this case.

On the other side of this question, 13.7% of the responding controllers answered NO. The most popular reason given for the NO response was the thought that President Reagan had painted himself into a corner by issuing the 48 hour ultimatum as he did in a Rose Garden news conference. These respondents feel the President had left himself without
a face-saving way out of the situation once the time limit
had been set and with no option other than to carry out the
threat he made. Some of the respondents also felt another
c consideration was that the President had no choice but to
fire the controllers due to pending negotiations with postal
workers and the potential for a labor action by that group.
As the PATCO job action was the President's first serious
confrontation with a federal labor organization since his
inauguration, a determined show of strength on the part of
the government was perceived as necessary. Indications were,
that if control of the broader picture of labor in general
was to be maintained, the controllers would have to be made
examples of.

4. Do you feel the ATC system has recovered to an
acceptable level of safety and efficiency?

When Question 4 was developed, it was intended to be a
cut-and-dry YES or NO question. Analysis of the data
received, however, indicated that a number of respondents
felt the question considered two separate concerns, safety
and efficiency, rather than as a combination. To express
their opinions, some respondents either checked both the YES
and NO boxes, or did not check any box. For the purpose of
accommodating these opinions, the responses were classified
together with those of the No Answer category. Figure 8
shows those who responded with both answers or no answer
represents 10.5% of the sample, or 40 respondents. There
were 14 responses indicating that in terms of safety, the
system has recovered, while in terms of efficiency it has not. Others who did not answer the question commented they were now too far removed from the industry to render a knowledgeable response.

Figure 8 indicates 70.8% of the sample believes the ATC system has not recovered from the effects of the PATCO strike. Supporting the negative response, there were three responses which were common. The most popular of the three was partially dependent upon second hand knowledge, meaning that according to people the respondents know who are working in the industry, and exposed to the ATC system, problems prevalent before the strike continue to hinder air traffic in today's system.

The second most common response concerned the efficiency level of the current system. The sample's responses point to flow control delays and fifteen mile in-trail restrictions contributing to an inefficient operation. Flow control refers to the monitoring of air traffic arriving, departing, or traversing areas typically burdened with excessive amounts of air traffic. Flow control takes into account the amount of anticipated traffic, weather conditions, runway usage, and other variables in a decision making process which dictates to the affected areas how much air traffic is permissible under the given conditions. These decisions affect the users of the system when the level set by flow control does not meet that requested by the users. The result is the issuance of "expect times", or the time when the user can expect to
receive a clearance for a flight plan to become active. The difference between the user's originally requested time and that given through flow control constitutes the delay the user will incur. Fifteen miles in-trail is the distance one aircraft must remain behind another to maintain current safe separation standards. Some of the subjects stated that in-trail restrictions relegated the controller to a position of being an air traffic monitor rather than an air traffic controller.

The third most common response referred to the number of full performance level (FPL) controllers now working the system versus the pre-strike level. Thirteen respondents were of the opinion the number of FPLs remains below acceptable levels to efficiently handle the current volume of air traffic.
Referring again to Figure 8, 18.7% of the respondents believe the air traffic control system has recovered from the strike. Many of the respondents answering YES to this question did so without comment. Those who did comment seemed to only grudgingly accept their answer by adding qualifying remarks such as references to the "Big Sky" theory, or citing the lack of major crashes involving controller error as the criteria on which their answer was based. The "Big Sky" theory is a common aviation reference to the idea that there is so much air space available that the odds of any two aircraft being at the same place at the same time are very low. Therefore, the probability of a collision is relatively low even without the presence of the air traffic controllers.

Of the 380 respondents included in this study, 12% or 47 of them are currently involved in aviation and have exposure to the current ATC system. Eleven respondents are pilots, three of whom believe the system has recovered while eight do not. Other respondents who work in the industry include six who now work in airport operations, three who are employed as aeronautical information specialists, and twenty-seven who are involved in air traffic control. Those involved in air traffic control include twelve who control air traffic for the Department of Defense, three who now control air traffic in a foreign country, and twelve who are employed by private air traffic control companies.
5. Do you feel the current ATC workforce has benefitted by your sacrifice, in terms of overall working conditions?

The data received for Question 5 of Part 2 reveals that the former air traffic controllers are nearly equally divided in their opinion of whether or not the present controllers are better off now because of the PATCO strike. As Figure 9 shows, 46.6% of the respondents believe the present controllers have benefitted by the PATCO controllers actions, while 43.1% feel they have not. Thirty-nine controllers, or 10.2%, did not answer the question.

The most popular answer of those holding the YES opinion referred to the increases in pay and benefits the current controllers have received since 1981. A number of respondents cited specific salary differences as a reason for their YES answer. One such response placed the yearly salary for a GS-14 step 4 position in 1981 at $42,000, versus the same position in 1992 receiving $70,000. The validity of the comparison was not verified due to the fact that the comment solicited by the opinionnaire was taken at face value as being true to the feelings of the individual respondent. There were other comparisons as well, but the point was made that the former controllers feel substantial monetary gains have been realized by the controllers now working for the FAA. Other benefits mentioned include pay differentials for controllers while they are performing on-the-job training for other controllers. Also, incentives are in place for those who work at facilities traditionally
Figure 9. Part 2, Question 5. Do you feel the current ATC workforce has benefitted by your sacrifice, in terms of overall working conditions?

difficult to staff because of the volume and complexity of the traffic managed at such sites. Several respondents summed up their sentiments by lamenting that the current controllers now have what the PATCO controllers had asked for.

The former controllers who answered NO to this question generally felt there had been negligible change during the past thirteen years. In particular, they believe the autocratic management style which pervaded the system in 1981 remains intact and unresponsive. Fifteen controllers (3.9%) stated their view that conditions had actually worsened for the controllers now working. Supporting the belief conditions had worsened since 1981, these controllers pointed to present controllers working more traffic with fewer FPLs and with an average skill level significantly below that of
1981. Others expressed their hopes that the working conditions in the FAA had improved, but were skeptical that they had.

6. **If the ban on rehiring was lifted, would you have reapplied for your position?**

   Question 6 of Part 2 asked the respondent to answer the question in each of four time frames. The time frames include the periods from 1 month to 3 years, 3 years to 7 years, 7 years to 11 years, and now, (Now refers to the time the opinionnaire was received by the respondent). The purpose of the question was to gauge if, when, and to what degree, the members of the sample would resign themselves to the eventual end of their endeavor to regain employment with the FAA.

   Referring to Figure 10, it is evident that when the strike began, and for the first three years following the strike, the vast majority (92.1%) of the controllers would have reapplied for their positions, if allowed. This three year period includes the time used to complete the appeal process attempted by much of the fired controller population, while hopes remained high for a negotiated settlement. As time passed through the second time frame to the seventh year after the strike, there was nearly a 10% drop in the number of controllers who would have opted to reapply to work air traffic. The largest drop, 14.7%, came between the second and third time frames which extends to eleven years after the strike.
Figure 10. Part 2, Question 6. If the ban on rehiring was lifted, would you have reapplied for your position?

The reasons given for the decline in the number of controllers who would reapply to the FAA are many. There are, however, three reasons which stand out among the others. The first is that a lot of time has passed and the controllers have begun new careers. These controllers are satisfied in their new vocations and would not risk their current positions, or cause renewed family upheaval in an unguaranteed attempt to become a controller again. Secondly, a number of controllers believe their advanced age would adversely affect their ability to be rehired. Third, some controllers expressed reservations regarding the current status of their health and the prospects of being able to pass the required physical examination.

Interestingly, the final time frame which asks if the respondent would reapply now produced an increase from 67.9% to 74.7%, with 94.7% of the respondents participating in this
portion of the question. These figures not only show a
slowing in the rate of decline in interest in reapplying, but
a 6.8% increase in those who would reapply. It is surmised
that the change in the trend developing in Figure 10 is
attributable solely to the fact that as the opinionnaires
were being disseminated, President Clinton lifted the banned-
for-life penalty imposed upon the controllers in the fall of
1993 and granted them the opportunity to reapply for
employment with the FAA. The lifting of the ban by President
Clinton has rekindled a spark of hope for those controllers
who still wish to return to the ATC profession.

Proof of the amount of interest created by the action of
President Clinton has been indicated by the thousands of
applications the FAA has received from former PATCO members.
The number of applicants continues to rise, although at the
time of this writing, no fired controllers have been rehired
through this initiative. Presently, there is a hiring freeze
in effect, but attempts are being made by PATCO Lives and
other groups to secure increased staffing appropriations to
expedite the rehiring of former PATCO members.

An observation regarding the steadfast determination of
the sample respondents was made obvious during the analysis
of the data for this question. As the tallies were
completed, it was noted that 60.3% of the controllers had
indicated they would have reapplied for their former
positions for all the time frames since the strike began. It
has been more than 13 years since the controllers lost their
jobs, but the desire to do what they feel they do the best remains a passionate goal. Contrasting this 60.3% figure with the 1.5% who responded that they would not have reapplied with the FAA at any time since the strike, one can sense how deep the sentiments of these controllers run. An example of the depth of feeling retained by some of the controllers is evidenced by the statements of two controllers. One stated, "I loved the profession and gave my life to it". The other said, "I miss my profession...ATC is what I am". As is the case with the other questions in Part 2 of the opinionnaire, a compilation of quoted responses for both sides of the questions is included in Appendix F.

7. Do you feel animosity would be an issue if PATCO controllers returned to the ATC system?

The issue of animosity, examined by this question, is one which must be dealt with by employees who have been involved in a strike, then returned to work with those who did not participate in or agree with the job action. Retribution has historically been a problem in emotionally charged strikes where some employees support the issues and others do not. This is especially the case when those who did not support the action benefit because of those who did. If PATCO controllers were reintegrated into the ATC system, it would be naive to assume there would be no harboring of animosity. It is with this thought in mind that Question 7 was asked. The feelings of the fired air traffic controllers, 13 years after the event, may reveal whether
emotions have calmed, or assist in determining to what extent precautions may be necessary if the controllers return to the FAA in substantial numbers.

Figure 11 illustrates the results received. Based solely on the depiction of the graph in this figure, the indication would be that the majority of PATCO controllers do not believe that animosity would be an issue if they were to return to the FAA. The comments accompanying the YES/NO answers, however, tend to moderate this majority to a certain degree. For example, a number of the controllers who answered NO go on to make statements such as, "No, at least not on my part". While the quantitative indication is NO, a fair assumption would suggest that the potential for animosity related problems exists, albeit not a blatant one. Nineteen controllers answered in this manner.

Twenty-five controllers responded that there would be some animosity. These controllers were inclined to chose the wording of their responses carefully, alluding that animosity would be on the part of others and not themselves. Another 22 respondents said if any ill will were evidenced, it would come from FAA management, not the returning controllers. The inference drawn from the controller's comments is that more controllers than represented in Figure 11 believe there would be some amount of animosity, but the controllers would not be the party responsible for initiating it.

Throughout the 13 years since the strike, the issue of animosity has been brought up each time the possibility of
reinstatement or reapplying was discussed. The graph in Figure 11, while indicating 76.5% of the controllers do not feel there would be an animosity issue, also shows 18.6% who believe there would be. The degree to which this percentage of controllers would be participants in any acts to demonstrate those feelings cannot be determined. Furthermore, it should be noted that no response specifically proposed or advocated any adverse actions, rather there was the generalized thought that someone other than the respondent would be the holder of any ill will.

Further analysis of the responses reflect the varied sentiments held by the controllers. Twelve felt that too much time had elapsed for there to be continued sensitivity in this matter. Several controllers remarked that they were professionals, and as such would put personal feelings aside in the performance of their duties. Others believe there are
so few people remaining who were working in 1981 that the question is moot. The fired controllers do not appear to hold any feelings of animosity towards the people who have been hired since the strike, recognizing they were simply seizing an employment opportunity presented by the FAA. Only six PATCO respondents specifically mentioned their disdain for strike breaking controllers they have labeled as "scabs" or "sprinters".

Considering the quantitative results together with the qualifying comments, the consensus opinion of the PATCO controllers regarding the animosity issue can be summarized as follows. The controllers generally feel that animosity will not prove to be an issue if they are returned to their former positions. This is not to say that there will not be isolated areas where evidence of animosity arises. There are still strong feelings among individuals within the sample such as those who feel they were wronged by the FAA and the President and have not completely reconciled the losses they have incurred. One of the most commonly agreed upon points, discussed further in Question 9 of Part 2, is the belief the controllers have that there will be a strong possibility that animosity and related problems will emanate from the FAA management ranks toward former PATCO members. Some of the expressed fears include, purposeful washouts while the controllers are retraining, offers of positions in geographical locations which are located unreasonable distances from the controller's current home, and abuses
aimed at continuing to make examples of the PATCO controllers and their failed actions of 1981.

8. If you were to return to the FAA, do you feel your ATC skills would be adversely affected by twelve years away from the position?

The passage of more than 13 years since the demise of PATCO constitutes a large portion of the careers of the former controllers who participated in the 1981 strike. These 13 years have been devoted to the search for, or working at, alternative vocations to the one they were trained to perform. The 13 year period also represents what would have been prime years for many of the controllers in terms of their proficiency in applying their ATC skills. This statement is based on the average amount of time the sample had been employed by the FAA, as related in Question 1 of Part 1. Now, because the potential exists for fired controllers to be rehired, there is cause to consider how these controllers feel their skills have fared during the extended time which has lapsed since they last worked an ATC position.

Results derived from the data received for this question indicate the sample holds confidence in its ability to respond to the challenge of once again controlling air traffic. This confidence, however, is tempered by the combined effects of advancing age, changing health, and prolonged absence from active controller duties. Indications that time may have taken a toll on a number of the former
Figure 12. Part 2, Question 8. If you were to return to the FAA, do you feel your ATC skills would be adversely affected by twelve years away from the position? controllers is evidenced by the 29.4% who responded YES to this question.

The graph in Figure 12 shows 66%, or 251 of the 380 sample controllers believe their skills at controlling air traffic have not been adversely affected by the years spent away from their former positions. Fifty-one of these respondents stated the 13 year period has had minimal effect on their skills and they would need little retraining to regain their former proficiency level. Another 29 controllers said they felt somewhat "rusty", inferring the probability their retraining would require additional time. Ten respondents cited the adage of air traffic control being likened to riding a bicycle, once you learn, you never forget. Additionally, 10 respondents answered with emphatic NO's, while 12 others noted they were currently working in an air traffic controller capacity. None of the 12 currently
working as ATC's mentioned having experienced difficulties in their retraining.

The most common response received from the 29.4% (112) of the respondents who answered YES blamed advanced age, its accompanying deterioration of physical abilities, and too much time away from the job for their belief that their skills have been adversely affected. Returning to Question 1 of Part 1 which asked how long the respondent had been employed as a controller, 16.2% or 62 controllers had accrued 15 to 27 years experience at the time of the strike. Assuming these controllers began their careers at age 20, they would now be between 47 and 59 years of age. Advanced age coupled with declining health make the passing of stringent annual medical examinations less easy to accomplish. While admitting their skills have diminished, many of these controllers still wish to return to their profession, believing their experience level to be preferable to hiring a person with no experience.

In the event a rehiring initiative is enacted, a possible area of debate may exist for either side of the rehiring issue regarding a controller's age versus his/her ability to perform ATC duties. At stake in this debate is the potential for the denial of consideration to some controllers due to their age. Because rehiring procedures have yet to be determined, the parameter of age may be restrictive, disqualifying many who feel they can do the job. One controller's view of this question regarding his ability,
relevant to age, reads as follows. "No. That's an ego
answer, my body is 48 but my brain still envisions that body
working 20 airplanes at a time."

9. What concerns would you have about returning to ATC?

The ban against fired PATCO members working as air
traffic controllers for the FAA was lifted in the fall of
1993 by President Clinton. This act opened the doors for
those fired controllers who have a continued desire to
control air traffic to reapply for positions within the FAA.
Since the ban was lifted, the FAA has received several
thousand applications from PATCO members, however, none have
been rehired through this initiative as of August, 1994. The
reason given by the government for not increasing staffing
levels with available PATCO controllers is a hiring freeze
within the FAA because of national budgetary constraints.

According to PATCO Lives, there remains resistance at
the FAA to PATCO controllers being rehired. PATCO Lives and
its network of supporters are continuing efforts to ensure
that when the hiring freeze is ended, the fired controllers
are given equal, if not preferential opportunity
for employment.

The PATCO controllers, generally in their middle aged
years, will have decisions to make should rehiring become a
reality. Relocation, re-qualifying, leaving current
occupations, and family upheaval are a few of the
considerations they have to take into account when deciding
to return to work for the FAA. For this reason, the concerns
the former controllers share in returning to the air traffic
profession are pertinent to this study, especially in light
of the number and experience level of those expressing a
desire to return to work. These figures are demonstrated by
data discussed earlier in this study. The information
obtained from this question may be of value to those
establishing rehire parameters, in that creating a desirable
"mix" of returning controllers may be preferable to an ad hoc
approach to placement.

The answers to Question 9 of Part 2 have been grouped by
the frequency of similar comments received. The comments are
combined into nine groups containing at least 15 similar
responses. Question 9, unlike the others in Part 2 of the
instrument, was not designed in a YES/NO quantifiable manner
for graphic presentation. Rather, the alternative method of
grouping by comment commonality was employed to enhance the
analysis of the responses. Additionally, the reader is given
the benefit of exposure to the shared concerns and
apprehension held by those controllers who may return to work
for the FAA. In organizing the responses into groups,
accommodation was made for respondents relating more than one
concern. Therefore, multiple responses may have been
included from individual controllers.

Interestingly, the most common response regarding the
former controllers returning to work was not a concern at
all. The response, simply stated, was "None". Seventy-three
(19.2%) of the respondents answered in this way. From this comment, it appears these controllers would be receptive to return to work offers and would be apt to do so without reservation or condition.

Approaching the most common response in frequency is the first response group expressing a concern. This response targets FAA management as responsible for the concern 65 (17.1%) of the controllers would have in returning to work. The fear of vendettas and discrimination, together with the belief that there has been no change within the autocratic management structure of the FAA fuels the concern generated by this response. Mention was made by some controllers that much of the FAA leadership present at the time of the strike has likely been reduced through retirement and attrition. Others who remain, however, have been mentors for the succeeding generation of supervisory personnel, creating the belief that a self perpetuating management cycle exists.

The third group consists of 48 (12.63%) controllers whose concern is the location they will be required to accept in order to gain employment. Many expect offers of reemployment will contain prohibitive, or unacceptable conditions of relocation. This example is representative of the choices PATCO controllers will have to make. An employment opportunity, contingent upon relocation, forces priority decisions to be made regarding family upheaval and displacement. These 48 controllers fear their opportunity may be lost because they will not be allowed to return to
their former facility or a facility near where they currently reside. Some submit the FAA may purposefully offer positions containing unacceptable relocation requirements. This, they feel, would present the FAA as benevolent towards the controllers while the controllers appear unappreciative by not accepting offered positions.

The fourth group cites fair treatment as a concern. Questions pertaining to pay, seniority, and training will affect the decisions of the controllers in this group. They fear their pay will not be commensurate with their experience level, and believe they will be required to accept a position below that held prior to the strike. These controllers wonder whether they will receive credit for their past work and have their seniority integrated with the currently working controllers, or be placed below those now working. Also, as mentioned earlier in this study, controllers train other controllers via on-the-job training. The PATCO controllers exhibit concern that they might not be given a fair opportunity to retrain by some of the current controllers who would conduct the training. Of great concern in this case would be a controller who was working in 1981 and did not support the strike having the responsibility to train a PATCO controller. Here, the aforementioned issue of animosity has the potential to become a factor in the training process. Thirty-four controllers, or 8.94% of the sample, are included in this group.
As indicated earlier, the majority of PATCO controllers are well into their middle aged years. Because of their age, the concern of retirement/age is a particularly critical one. There were 28 (2.36%) respondents who expressed this concern. Some because they had very little time left to go before attaining retirement eligibility. Other controllers questioned their ability, because of their age, to do the job after such an extended absence.

A point which warrants comment on the issues of retirement and age is the fact that, in the case of new hires, the FAA maintains a hiring cutoff age of 31. From the responses received, there are relatively few controllers concerned with the hiring cutoff age, apparently assuming that because they are being considered for rehire, the age restriction will not apply. Concern may be warranted, however, since the rehiring parameters have not been revealed by the FAA. For example, should the FAA decide 45 years of age is the oldest they will consider for rehire, a large portion of the population would be automatically ineligible. Forty-five is an arbitrary figure, but the significance of the point is obvious. Unless forced to consider all applicants equally, the FAA will have the freedom to discriminately choose the controllers it wishes to rehire. The effort to lift the ban on rehiring PATCO controllers emphasized the experience of the fired controllers as a means of restoring capacity to the ATC system. Determining the appropriate mix of age and experience against the unknown
point of diminishing return as it applies to the controllers abilities will be a formidable task.

The sixth concern, expressed by 24 controllers, was checkout. Checkout refers to re-qualifying to the full performance proficiency level. While approximating the fourth concern of fair treatment, the sixth concern is specific to the retraining/re-qualifying issue. The fear involved with this concern is the possible consequence of being removed from employment once again, this time due to lack of performance, or a perception thereof. Again, on-the-job training is imperative to this end. Having to depend on the variable of individual trainers being conducive to the task of re-qualifying PATCO controllers creates a situation whereby the PATCO controllers feel they will have no control. The controllers may have confidence in their abilities, but they cannot control the attitudes of persons doing the training. The potential for arbitrary disqualification in this manner, after recommitting to the ATC profession by giving up present occupations and moving families, weighs heavily. This, added to the inherent difficulty in attaining a desirable proficiency level under normal circumstances forms the basis for the controllers' concern in re-qualifying.

The seventh concern the controllers have is, the same conditions exist now as before the strike. Twenty-two (5.78%) of the respondents intimated they would be afraid that the perceptions they held before the strike, indeed,
went on strike for, remain unchanged. Many controllers hold hope that conditions have improved, partially accounting for their desire to return. Not fully knowing the present conditions within the FAA does cause a degree of anxiety, however, for controllers hoping to return to work. Some who struck because of conditions endured prior to 1981 will not return. These controllers feel whatever changes have taken place since 1981 fall short of what is needed to improve the system.

The eighth concern group is made up of former controllers who desire to return to work but feel they will no longer meet the requirements of the annual physical exam. Failing eyesight, high blood pressure, and diabetes are a few of the medical conditions mentioned that are capable of causing a failure of the physical exam. In compiling the results for this question, it was somewhat surprising that there were so few (20) respondents expressing the physical as a concern. Based on the numerous instances throughout the study where physical problems were indicated as potential hindrances, it was expected that this figure would be appreciably higher.

The ninth group with a minimum 15 respondents sharing a concern expresses an emotional fear most people can empathize with. The anxiety these 15 controllers have is in wondering whether they will fit-in with their new co-workers. Given the turmoil the strike has created in many of the controller's lives, it is understandable how profound the
feelings of these men and women will be as they return to an FAA facility for the first time after the passage of more than 13 years.

Fitting in is assumed desirable and as such causes anxious moments for any employee entering a new environment. In the case of the PATCO controllers, the feeling associated with fitting in will be heightened by questions of who the co-workers are. If they are "scabs", will there be animosity? If they were hired after the strike, will they be upset if the returning PATCO controllers retain their seniority? How will PATCO controllers be received by NATCA controllers? These questions and others legitimize the PATCO controller's concern about fitting in.

Again, the nine groups discussed in this question relate the most frequently echoed concerns of the sample. There were numerous other concerns unique to individuals which did not fit into the categories used. Examples of quoted controller concerns are included in Appendix I.
Chapter 4
Conclusion

This retrospective analysis of the PATCO controllers and their strike offered a unique opportunity to examine the feelings of a particularly intriguing group of people. The controllers, denied the legal right to strike because of their federal employee status, engaged in an illegal strike on August 3, 1981. They did this knowing severe penalties could be imposed, but believing what they were doing was necessary. History has proven the strike was ill-advised by practical standards, but the majority of the sample maintains now, as it did in 1981, that they were justified in their actions.

Question 1 of the opinionnaire, when compared to Question 2 regarding controller sentiment about the justifiability of the strike, shows a 16.5% decrease in the number of respondents. Eighty-seven percent of the controllers believed their actions were justified in 1981. Those who now, in retrospect, remain convinced the strike was a justifiable cause comprises 70.5% of the sample. Comments submitted by the respondents permeate the study, relating feelings of loss, bitterness, and remorse due to being removed from the careers they chose. In spite of the 16.5% moderation in their conviction and the losses they have
incurred, there is an acute sense of pride emanating from the responses of this group of professionals.

By engaging the FAA in the 1981 strike, the PATCO controllers brought upon themselves the unprecedented wrath of their government. Never before had a public sector union been destroyed in its entirety by the government as PATCO was. The PATCO controllers held steadfastly to their beliefs, which culminated in their terminations from the FAA. As time passed, the increasing price paid in failed marriages, broken families, and lost income has taken a toll on how strongly the controllers believe in what they did versus what was accomplished by it. In retrospect the controllers exhibit misgivings regarding the timing, methodology, and economic advisability of going on strike when they did.

Based on the data received from the opinionnaire, and the accompanying comments supporting those data, the hypothesis is accepted. The hypothesis stated that the majority of controllers would feel continued justification in their actions of 1981, although these feelings of justification would be mitigated by the fact the controllers lost their jobs by their action. Also, the perception of the current state of the air traffic control system suggests many of the key issues that led to the strike remain unresolved.

The rebuilding of the FAA's air traffic system has been ongoing since the first day of the strike. Initially, the FAA used supervisory personnel and military controllers to
supplement the controllers who did not participate in the strike in an effort to keep the system from failing. As the months wore on and the military controllers returned to their duty stations, the FAA began to replace them with newly hired employees. These employees were placed after completing accelerated training programs at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma.

Controversial issues surrounding the rebuilding of the system such as the alleged placing of previously disqualified candidates and a congressional inquiry into improprieties at the FAA Academy have surfaced during the years since the strike. Controller dissatisfaction continues to grow as the system rebuilds. This is evidenced by the formation of the NATCA union and its recent moves to become more aggressive in pressing the FAA to address a number of complaints. One such complaint calls for an increase in staffing. NATCA and other currently working controllers echo many of the same complaints PATCO attempted to correct, but the FAA remains slow to respond, adding to controller frustration. "Despite assurances of FAA officials and field supervisors that the system is working well, most observers with whom we discussed the issue spoke of an air traffic control system plagued by low morale and growing internal tension." (Nader & Smith, 1994, p. 130). NATCA, wary of PATCO's demise and bound by a no-strike clause, appears similar to PATCO during its early years. NATCA is a voice for the controllers, but is limited in its ability to effect change.
Although some gains have been made since the strike, the system lacks the tools, in terms of manpower and equipment, to perform at optimum efficiency. According to NATCA, "Too often people were being certified because they needed the controllers, not because they possessed the prerequisite skills." (Nader & Smith, 1994, p. 133). PATCO controllers have been a ready resource that, until President Clinton lifted the ban, has been neglected as a solution.

Comparisons have been drawn over the past 13 years between PATCO and other groups which acted against their government in violation of the law. One group is that of draft dodgers who chose to move to Canada rather than participate in the Vietnam war. This group was accepted back into the country with fewer restrictions and less persecution than the PATCO controllers received.

Another comparison is one which appears as ironic as it does contradictory. Pictured on an Atlanta newspaper shortly after the strike began was a striking PATCO member being led to jail, manacled at the wrists, waist, and ankles. His crime was his participation in the air traffic controllers' strike. On the same front page, the newspaper carried an article which featured President Reagan lauding the courage of Polish labor leader Lech Walesa and his Solidarity union for engaging in a strike against an oppressive Polish government. Both unions, PATCO and Solidarity, participated in illegal strikes, but were seen in two completely different ways by the administration of this country.
The time has come, according to NATCA, President Clinton, ALPA, and aviation safety advocates to allow those PATCO controllers who wish to return to the ATC profession, to do so.

"If this were simply a matter of humane consideration for the thousands who lost their professions, it would be worthwhile. But rehiring the controllers would do more than help individuals, it would promote the national interest and improve the aviation safety system." (Nader & Smith, 1994, p. 139).

The opportunity exists to reinstall experience into the system, experience lost with the dismissal of the PATCO controllers. This study provides information relevant to the population of PATCO controllers and, as the sample indicates, the consensus opinion of these controllers shows a willingness on the part of many to return to their chosen profession.
The purpose of this study was to determine the consensus opinion of controllers fired for their part in the PATCO strike of 1981. With that accomplished, and the majority of these controllers indicating they would like to return to the FAA, the recommendations of the researcher center around that point. Since it has been determined that most users of the system now agree benefits can be realized by the return of PATCO controllers, the conditions and processes required to implement such a return must be worked out. Negotiations in this regard are currently being conducted by PATCO Lives, other controller groups, and, as mentioned in the study, in the court case on the issue of rehiring after the three year penalty period.

This study presented a number of fears and concerns PATCO controllers would have in returning to work. It is recommended that consideration be given to those concerns. If the FAA's desire is to develop a cooperative working relationship, the rehiring process will have to be administered with integrity and equality. Attention to the installation of safeguards ensuring fairness in the return of PATCO controllers to work is also deemed necessary. The fairness referred to is in regards to both the process of the
selection of candidates and the integration of those candidates into the system. If a rehiring occurs in which numerous controllers are permitted to return, it is recommended that an independent committee be established for the purpose of reviewing complaints of inequities in the controller's retraining/checkout.

Further study may be required to more precisely determine the extent to which the sample's skills have diminished. If skill levels indicate an appreciable decline in proficiency at a given level of traffic, or at a particular age, then parameters prohibiting placement of controllers in facilities while not properly skilled may be needed. The applications received by the FAA from PATCO members can serve as a source for the FAA to conduct its own poll to gain information specifically geared to those actively pursuing a return to work. This retrospective study was intended to gauge the feelings of the sample controllers regardless of whether they were resolved to return to work as an air traffic control specialist or not. By surveying only those actively pursuing an air traffic position, a more concise analysis will be available for use in establishing the parameters for rehire.

The possibility of PATCO controllers regaining employment with the FAA is dependent on the appropriation of funds via budgetary approvals for increased staffing. There have been no PATCO controllers rehired since President Clinton lifted the ban on their eligibility. As hiring
constraints are relaxed, it would be reasonable to expect PATCO controllers be hired as positions become available. The experience represented by this group is plentiful as well as available and it would be advisable to tap this resource to improve the ATC System.
References


APPENDIX A

PART 2, QUESTION 1
Part 2, Question 1

When the strike began, did you feel it was a justifiable cause?

1. I was working 58 hours a wk and maxing out, working and not getting paid got old after a while.

2. Understaffed - Poor equipment - working 3 man positions alone.

3. It was basically mob rule Peer Pressure, if one did not participate, what fate would be yours?

4. Having worked in a center, I knew a lot of the stress.

5. I was 46 and running on nerves. But 50 was the retirement age. The entire profession needs looking at.

6. Force the govt to recognize the conditions of the system.

7. FAA was trying to destroy Union. Strike was attempt to save Union.

8. Absolutely - 100%.

9. I didn't want to strike, voted against it, but followed the union.

10. Right battle, wrong time to fight.

11. Not because of the money but because of the safety issues.

12. There was no other choice that a loyal, Red blooded, American, Dedicated to Right & Fair & the American Way, could make.

13. 85% can't be wrong.

14. Could have achieved more by staying in.
15. No question about it.

16. The equipment was over worked and needed to be updated.
APPENDIX B

PART 2, QUESTION 2
In retrospect, do you now feel the strike was justified?

1. More than ever, my losses don't change the principle.
2. I participated only to help protect my fellow controllers. I did so with guilt about breaking my word.
3. In our facility, retirement was rare.
4. 3.5 Billion dollars in ATC Delays in the FAA's effort to still keep us out.
5. Justified, but unwise. A suicide mission if ever I saw one.
6. Even though I paid dearly.
7. FAA has not changed.
8. Yes but I wouldn't do it again.
9. Have you ever been unemployed?
10. We were set-up to be scape-goats, not worth losing our jobs over.
11. No, only with reference to staggering financial losses incurred by those fired.
12. Yes, but not worth the pain & suffering caused by same.
13. The cause was justified; the action was suicide for the controllers, premeditated murder by the govt.
14. Damage done to families, fellow controllers, and the system was too great for what was gained by the public thus far.
15. We lost, and the country resents us and our strike, the only people who benefitted were the scabs who replaced us.

16. Not at the loss of all our careers.

17. Modernization program is now 15 years behind schedule.

18. The scabs got what we asked for.
APPENDIX C

PART 2, QUESTION 3
Part 2, Question 3

Do you feel the government had any viable alternative to terminating you after the 48 hour return to work ultimatum was issued?

1. What do they (Helms & Lewis) feel about destroying the system so thoroughly?

2. Suspension, fine, etc. but not termination forever!!

3. The talent cost of controllers was not told to the public.

4. It appears the govt didn't want a settlement.

5. Much too harsh - they forgave draft dodgers.

6. There was no 48 hr period to return. You have bought the FAA lie, also. We at Sacramento, CA were locked out & not allowed a return option.

7. They could have done the wise and compassionate thing; i.e., bargained in good faith or found a mediator who could. This would also have fulfilled their legal and moral obligations to the flying public.

8. Once the ridiculous ultimatum was issued by Reagan there was no backing down.

9. Would John Wayne have backed down?

10. There is/are/were many alternatives - however I would have done the same if I was in their position.

11. Could have had "Cooling off" period with continued negotiations.

12. Reagan and his cronies welcomed and encouraged the strike. They wanted to make a statement with the firings.

13. Negotiate and settle the issues.
Part 2, Question 4

Do you feel the ATC system has recovered to an acceptable level of safety and efficiency?

1. Safety record seems to be ok.
2. We found out we could be replaced.
3. I fly as a pilot on a regular basis in the midwest and I have no fears of the system being unsafe.
4. I'd like to think otherwise but the facts wouldn't hold up another opinion.
5. As an airline pilot for 6 years I personally observed many deficiencies.
6. I haven't flown since 1981 and I won't. The ATC system is unsafe because the FAA brought back people that had previously washed out.
7. The system will never recover from the lost time, money and manpower wasted during the strike.
8. Not according to friends on the inside.
9. I worked for the City of Laredo Tower for 9 mo. The system has not recovered.
10. Not based on what friends in the airline industry and at the NTSB tell me. I don't fly as a result of things they have told me.
11. I work in it and I can tell you for sure it hasn't.
12. As a commercial pilot, my confidence in the system is very low and it is evident that expertise and experience are lacking.
13. I see it every day - it's in terrible condition.
14. My husband flies for a regional airline. He says "no way."

15. I'm still in the business and well aware of the safety problems.

16. No! Definitely not. I work with a center and they need help BAD!!
Part 2, Question 5

Do you feel the current ATC workforce has benefitted by your sacrifice, in terms of overall working conditions?

1. I hear the same complaints from current ATC's that we had in 81'.

2. My replacement makes $80,000 per yr - thanks to me.

3. They have told me so. One guy even had the balls to come and thank me.

4. Previous GS-13 (37k) now GS-14's @ 62.5k - say what?

5. They're still burning them out as fast as before.

6. As a GS-14-4 in 1981 Annual Salary $42.000. As a GS-14-4 in 1992 Annual Salary $70,000+.

7. They now get extra pay for time spent training other people. Something PATCO fought for for years.

8. My son now works in ATC and I see it in working conditions, pay and benefits - but still poor management.

9. Yes, they have my job - making the income I should be.

10. Flow control; increased separation.

11. I believe they got more than we ever wanted.

12. I know about 15 controllers (all hired since 81') in several facilities, and my impression is nothing (management's attitude) has changed.

13. Very much so.

14. I understand that management has become more receptive to their needs and they get compensated generously for doing what was taken for granted in the past.
APPENDIX F

PART 2, QUESTION 6
Part 2, Question 6

If the ban on rehiring was lifted, would you have reapplied for your position?

1. Whether I'm working or not, I'm an ATC.

2. I am in another career and have no desire to work for the FAA.

3. I did reapply & was rejected.

4. I was 1 year from retirement. Would like to get enough time to retire.

5. I'm 58 years old and brain dead. I might reapply but only for the sport of it.

6. The strike will not be over for me until I walk into the center and put on a headset again.

7. Much better off with my health, much happier - would never go back - that feels good!

8. Would like to leave job on my own conditions.

9. I am happy at what I now do but I loved my position with the FAA.

10. If only I knew what to expect.

11. It was my chosen career.

12. I would like to finish what I started.

13. I'm hurtin' & have no career to support my family.

14. I miss my profession...ATC is what I am.

15. I loved my job. It was the bosses that sucked.

17. Why go back to what is worse now than when we left.

18. I believe the demands of that job are too great on the family.

19. I am over 50 now and wouldn't. Could still do it but it's not worth what it would cost me.
Part 2, Question 7

Do you feel animosity would be an issue if PATCO controllers returned to the ATC system?

1. I just want to get on with my life, and help rebuild the system if I can.

2. Time heals all wounds. If anyone, on either side, still feels any animosity after 12 years, then I guess I just feel sorry for them. The true professionals will still be true professionals.

3. Absolutely none.

4. 12 years is a long time to carry a grudge, isn't it?

5. We're older and wiser.

6. Its over.

7. I work with FAA controllers. They want us back, no bad feelings.

8. Once accepted the new ATC's would realize we are not the monsters they thought we were.

9. I lost my job through my own actions - not the replacement action.

10. Most of the controllers I talk to would like us back.

11. Controllers are a lot of things, but they are not generally stupid.

12. Be realistic! Some of these guys got in two years what some of us worked 20 years for.

13. The old FAA will never forget.

14. I'm still angry about being fired.
15. No animosity among working controllers but I've talked to some scab supervisors who are afraid of us coming back to work.

16. I'm not interested in violence, but will never trust a "sprinter".

17. There are a lot of bad feelings on both sides.
Part 2, Question 8

If you were to return to the FAA, do you feel your ATC skills would be adversely affected by twelve years away from the position?

1. I had a guest shot for 30 minutes. I still have it.

2. The aptitude for the job is the most important factor for success.

3. I'm 50, maybe FSS.

4. Affected yes, adversely no.

5. Controlling traffic is a diminishing skill.

6. I am a controller.

7. I would still be 1000 times better than someone off the street.

8. I'm pretty well rested now.

9. I live by my old tower and watch the traffic, and the current controllers don't move traffic as efficiently as I do in my head.

10. At age 60 I feel that I can still do the work.

11. I'd be rusty, but could catch up rapidly.

12. It's like riding a bike.

13. I would be FPL in minimum time!!!

14. It's a lot easier than it used to be.

15. I was at my peak 12 years ago.
APPENDIX I

PART 2, QUESTION 9
Part 2, Question 9

What concerns would you have about returning to ATC?

1. Before it was a family, now it would be a job.

2. Finding my headset HA HA.

3. My bitterness toward the FAA, ALPA, and the currently working strike breaking scum, will not allow me to work in harmony with them.

4. Psychic survival in a hostile environment. Whether I'd get a fair deal on checkout. Pretty much the same concerns I had before. Being a woman in the FAA is not an easy thing.

5. They can't deal with us, controllers, thinking for ourselves, standing up for ourselves, we will never be sheep.

6. Have a training instructor who has a hard on for PATCO folks.

7. The FAA not using us to really rebuild the ATC system, but to just continue to make negative examples of us...

8. I am not sure I would have the "love" for ATC I once had.

9. The next strike.

10. Not being able to be the controller I was when I got fired.

11. My concerns would be that all I have sacrificed was for nothing.

12. The former scabs are now running the show.
APPENDIX J

OPINIONNAIRE
Dear fellow PATCO controller: Please take a moment now to complete the following opinionnaire. The information will be used in a confidential manner for a study accessing the retrospective and current feelings of those controllers involved in the strike of 1981. Your opinions are very important, so please answer fully and honestly and return by mail within 14 days to: Steven Durnin-717 S. Beach St. #317C-Daytona Beach-Florida-32114. Thank you very much. The results of this study will be made available to Bill Taylor at its completion.

PART 1 (Please check appropriate space - explain if other)

1. How long were you employed by the Federal Aviation Administration as an air traffic control specialist?
   0-5 yrs __ 5-10 yrs __ 10-15 yrs __ 15-20 yrs __ other __

2. What level of facility were you assigned to at the time of the strike?
   lvl 1 __ lvl 2 __ lvl 3 __ lvl 4 __ lvl 5 __ other __

3. What type of facility were you assigned to?
   Tower __ Tracon __ Center __ other __

4. In which state was the facility located?
   ___________________________________________ (fill in state name)

5. What is your current occupation?
   ___________________________________________ (fill in occupation)

Part 2 (Please check appropriate space - fill in comment space)

1. When the strike began, did you feel it was a justifiable cause? YES __ NO __ (check one)
   comment ___________________________________________

2. In retrospect, do you now feel the strike was justified? YES __ NO __ (check one)
   comment ___________________________________________
3. Do you feel the government had any viable alternative to terminating you after the 48 hour return to work ultimatum was issued?  
YES ____  NO ____ (check one)  
comment _________________________________________________________________

4. Do you feel the ATC system has recovered to an acceptable level of safety and efficiency?  YES ____  NO ____  
comment _________________________________________________________________

5. Do you feel the current ATC workforce has benefitted by your sacrifice, in terms of overall working conditions?  
YES ____  NO ____  
comment _________________________________________________________________

6. If the ban on rehiring was lifted, would you have reapplied for your position?  (answer YES or NO to each time frame)  
   1 mo. to 3 yrs ____  3 yrs to 7 yrs ____  
   7 yrs to 11 yrs ____  
   Would you reapply now?  YES ____  NO ____  
comment _________________________________________________________________

7. Do you feel animosity would be an issue if PATCO controllers returned to the ATC system?  YES ____  NO ____  
comment _________________________________________________________________

8. If you were to return to the FAA, do you feel your ATC skills would be adversely affected by twelve years away from the position.  YES ____  NO ____  
comment _________________________________________________________________

9. What concerns would you have about returning to ATC?  ________________________________________________________________
### Part 1, Question 5

Occupations Held By Former Controllers

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Rail Traffic Control
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Auditor
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Clerk
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Welder
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Golf Pro
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Federal Food Inspector
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Exporter
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Sign Maker
1
Film Design/Analysis Technician
1
Kitchen Design
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Steel Fabricator
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Federal Special Agent
1
Department of Labor Investigation
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Longshoreman
1
Housewife/Mother
1
Jeweler
1
Tech Writer
1
Project Coordinator
1
Chemical Worker
1
Surveyor
1
Printer
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Mechanic
1
Hearing Instrument Specialist
1
Department of Interior
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Disability Determinations
1
Surfer
1
Real Estate Appraiser
1
Utility Company
1
Auto Builder
1
Paralegal
1
Satellite Controller
1
Firefighter
1
Ostrich Raiser