

Back in 1999/2000, AMFA was going to strike and Bush stopped it with a Presidential Emergency Board. From that AMFA settled on an industry leading contract for the industry with no help from anyone else. Read the highlights in RED and how great the AFL/CIO and the IAM show support for our careers back in 2000 and as you have seen in the future.

<http://www.labornotes.org/2001/05/airlines-claim-poverty-after-years-record-profits-bush-backs-management>

Airlines Claim Poverty After Years of Record Profits; Bush Backs Management

May 18, 2001 / Malik Miah and Rich Lesnik [Enlarge](#) or [shrink](#) text [login](#) or [register](#) to comment

Tens of thousands of airline workers are working under open contracts, most of them at the four largest carriers. Airline workers are angry and frustrated because all the major airlines made record profits over the last seven years, after big worker concessions in the 1980s and early 90s.

Because they are covered by the Railway Labor Act, the airline managements have been able to drag out contract negotiations until a downturn in the economy. Generally it takes a year or more before a settlement is reached. Thus the airlines are crying poormouth, ignoring years of record profits and frozen or stagnating wages.

- Ninety-eight hundred Northwest Airlines mechanics, cleaners, and custodians were without a contract for four and a half years.
- American Airlines flight attendants have been in negotiations for three and a half years, and American's mechanics' contract opened up late last fall.
- Delta pilots have been in negotiations for more than 18 months and are under the National Mediation Board, which has suggested binding arbitration. Delta agreed; the pilots said no and the NMB released the parties to a 30-day cooling off period. At the end of April a strike becomes possible unless called off by President Bush.
- United Airlines mechanics, cleaners, ramp and stores service workers, customer service and reservation agents have been without a new contract since last July. United's flight attendants have been conducting a war of words with UAL management over mid-term wage adjustments in their ten-year contract.

Workers have responded to management's stalling in a number of ways:

UNIONS RESPOND

- Pilots at Comair, a regional airline owned by Delta, walked out March 26, battling a management that eliminated all work rules and wants to maintain starting pilot salaries of under \$20,000. Though Bush hasn't yet intervened, he could do so at any moment.
- On April 3 the United flight attendants announced a 97 percent vote to organize a CHAOS campaign (Creating Havoc Around Our System) if United goes ahead with its purchase of US Airways before meeting their demands for wage increases and job protection.
- Pilots at United elected a more militant leadership before negotiations in December 1999. They carried out an effective "work to rule" and no-overtime campaign, helping an already chaotic, mismanaged schedule to become unmanageable. They finally forced management to grant them everything they'd sought, leading other pilots' unions to fight for the same.
- Rank and file workers have responded by scrupulously following work and safety rules and FAA and OSHA regulations and declining to work voluntary overtime. Management has countered with court action, even enlisting some unions' help in quelling worker unrest.

- **At Northwest two years ago, mechanics and cleaners voted out the International Association of Machinists (IAM) in favor of an independent union, the Airline Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA). Immediately negotiations took on a more militant, open, and democratic character.**

Cleaners, the lowest paid workers, were able to elect their own representative to the negotiating committee. Weekly and often daily updates on details of the negotiations were distributed widely to the membership, and negotiating sessions were open to AMFA member observers every day.

AMFA's democratic process solidified rank and file support for the union negotiators, and put more pressure on management to respond openly to union demands. The National Mediation Board finally declared an impasse, and the union prepared to strike at midnight March 10.

BUSH ISSUES EXECUTIVE ORDER

On March 9 President Bush issued an Executive Order preventing the strike. (Bush's Secretary of Labor is a recent member of the Northwest board of directors.) The order established a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) of three members charged with making recommendations to settle the contract. On April 9 the parties announced a tentative agreement.

The last time a president intervened in an airline dispute was 1997, when President Clinton stopped the pilots at American from going on strike. That was the first time a PEB was used in an airline conflict since the early 60's. (The use of PEBs and Congressional intervention have been more common on railroads, where the unions were somewhat more militant and more commodities are moved, thus impacting the economy quickly.)

Bush's intervention was aimed at sending a message to organized labor. He added that he would not allow any airline strikes this year.

The attack on airline labor brought a sharp response from AMFA. "The government is running interference for the company," said O.V. Delle-Femine, AMFA's national director. AMFA initiated a public protest at the White House on March 12 and at airports across the country. Another informational picket was planned by a coalition of airline mechanics and others for April 13.

These actions were organized by ad hoc groups of rank and file workers, without participation of the union leaderships other than AMFA. They attracted hundreds of pilots, flight attendants, mechanics, ramp and customer service workers.

'TONE DOWN' AMFA SUPPORT

The AFL-CIO condemned the Executive Order at Northwest, but recent developments are troubling. The international office of the Teamsters pressured Teamsters Local 2000, representing Northwest flight attendants, to **"tone down" their support for AMFA**. When asked to "put it in writing" by the local's president, Danny Campbell, Teamsters Airline Division Director Ray Benning declined.

Joe Uehlein, director of strategic campaigns for the AFL-CIO, said that AMFA didn't deserve assistance from AFL-CIO affiliates. And in Minneapolis, Northwest's major hub and AMFA's largest Northwest local, Central Labor Council President Dick Johnson issued a statement March 7 to all AFL-CIO affiliates: "We should not be offering any assistance to AMFA."

Local 2000 Secretary-Treasurer Bob Krabbe responded, "How arrogant can you possibly be, to say you are all about labor, but only if you are with the AFL-CIO? The enemy here is not the other labor unions, it is Northwest management." Steve MacFarlane, president of AMFA Local 33 in Minneapolis, said that other local unions at Northwest appear willing to help. "It's more of an AFL-CIO edict," he said. (All above quotes appeared in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, March 30, 2001.)

The IAM national leadership was less critical of Bush than was the AFL-CIO. **Robert Roach, general vice president of transportation for the IAM**, said after the order was issued: "I don't think we want to interpret for the President what he means and lock him into a position. Let's let things play out." In a letter to the New York Times, **he gave no word of solidarity with Northwest workers.**

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the IAM blames AMFA for the failure to get new contracts at both Northwest and United. In a letter to members, **Scotty Ford, the district president for United mechanics, attacked AMFA for the situation at Northwest.**

He blamed AMFA's open bargaining strategy for the impasse and charged supporters at United with disrupting the United negotiating process. There was neither criticism of Bush's intervention at Northwest nor a mention of solidarity with the workers there.

On March 30 the AMFA filed for a new representation election at United, to replace the IAM. The government must certify that at least 50 percent plus one of the mechanics and cleaners have signed cards before an election is called.

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