

NW Airlines unions say they won't be picked apart anymore

By MICHAEL KUCHTA

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. (PAI) — Union leaders at Northwest Airlines pledged Dec. 7 to stick together as never before to save jobs and fight the airline's strategy of using bankruptcy as an excuse to outsource thousands of workers.

"There's no sense saving Northwest Airlines if we can't save our jobs," Capt. Mark McClain told several hundred workers during a rally in Bloomington, Minn., near airline headquarters.

"Northwest Airlines is not management's airline — it's our airline," said McClain, chairman of the Air Line Pilots Association at Northwest, who sounded a theme repeated in different ways throughout the rally.

"All of us have been here many, many years. We're not going to save Northwest Airlines for management, we're not going to save it for the board, we're not going to save it for the investors. We're going to save it for all of us."

The unity among the Northwest Airlines unions is notable because it marks a change of course. All but one of the unions involved is an AFL-CIO union. The exception is the independent Pro-

fessional Flight Attendants Association (PFAA). It also had steered an independent course during recent troubles.

Northwest's other independent union, the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association — whose mechanics were forced to strike four months ago — was not there. But individual AMFA members were at the meeting and distributed literature.

Nevertheless, pilots, ground workers and flight attendants stood shoulder to shoulder at the rally to send a message of solidarity — the most visible demonstration of union cooperation at the airline in a dozen years.

"We saw what happened on this property with a more go-it-alone strategy," McClain said, making a not-so-veiled reference to AMFA, which disaffiliated from the Machinists Union. Other unions have not honored the picket lines of that independent union, which represents mechanics, cleaners and custodians. They note it did not honor their lines, and tried to raid them.

"That's certainly not going to work," McClain said. "All of us sticking together, working together, is going to be paramount for us to get through this environment." But the unions face a Jan.

17 court hearing where Northwest could demand contracts end.

The speeches are more than rhetoric, union leaders say: The pilots, Machinists Air Transport District 143, PFAA and smaller unions are meeting regularly as a "labor advisory council" to devise common strategies at the bargaining table and beyond.

One reason for the new unity is that members of all Northwest's unions face the threat of outsourcing. The most recent manifestation of that was a company scheme to outsource all Flight Attendant jobs on overseas trips and on planes with a capacity of 100 or fewer. All overseas flights would be staffed by foreign flight attendants.

The three large unions continue bargaining with Northwest, facing a Jan. 16 deadline to reach agreements their members can approve. Northwest says that if the unions don't agree to new contracts, it will ask the bankruptcy court to rip up existing contracts, allowing the airline to impose its will on workers. If that happens, unions say, they have the right to strike, potentially shutting Northwest down, perhaps for good.

In its bankruptcy filings, Northwest says it wants \$997 million in concessions from the three unions. The airline's plan includes additional job cuts, additional wage and benefit cuts, and extensive outsourcing. Besides the flight attendant outsourcing, it is demanding that non-union pilots fly planes that carry fewer than 100 passengers and wants non-union ground crews at most airports outside of Min-

neapolis-St. Paul and Detroit. Those two airports are its two main hubs.

Management decided "to beat concessions out of the employees who have spent years building and bringing success to Northwest Airlines," said PFAA Vice President Doug Moe. He reminded the crowd that while executives "push for too much," they still find ways "to justify bonuses and rewards for mediocre leadership."

Speakers said it is up to workers to support each other and save Northwest.

"We are workers, no matter who or what you do for Northwest," said Bobby DePace, president of Northwest's Machinists local. "We are workers, and we will stand united and we will stand together."

Executives were "morally criminal" at Northwest, said Minnesota AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Steve Hunter. "When you place corporate greed over the lives and families of your workers, that is immoral and it is wrong."

He called Northwest executives "incompetent" and said the flying public should "Thank God that all of you do your jobs better than they do theirs." Workers should "come together as a family: Hold each other up, keep each other strong, be there for each other."

"Don't take the frustrations of this environment out on each other," McClain said. "Keep Northwest Airlines running as best we can. And we'll run Northwest Airlines — in spite of management."

Three Change to Win unions sign Solidarity Charters with Metal Trades Department

Three unions affiliated with the Change to Win Coalition (CTW) have signed Solidarity Charter agreements with the AFL-CIO's Metal Trades Department. The agreements with the Carpenters, Teamsters and United Food and Commercial Workers allow the unions — which disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO — to remain involved in the department at the local council level.

"We recognize the importance of sustaining our local leadership and maintaining the longstanding relationships supporting our bargaining units," said Metal Trades Department President Ron Ault.

Service Employees International Union also is expected to sign a Solidarity Charter agreement with the department.

In October, the CTW unions and the national AFL-CIO reached agreement on a Solidarity Charter program to allow CTW locals to participate in state, area and local AFL-CIO organizations.

Union-Industries Show will proceed under new name and new focus

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The AFL-CIO Union-Industries Show — starting this year in Cleveland — will be promoted under the name "America@Work," followed by the tag line: "100% Union-Made, American-Made Products, Services and Jobs."

Exit surveys from the 2005 show in Portland revealed that more than half the

attendees were not union members, but favored unions in general. They viewed the show as a chance to demonstrate their support for unions, to investigate jobs and training opportunities and to learn about union-made products and services.

The 2006 show, slated for Cleveland, Ohio, May 5-7, also will focus more on educating the public about trade unionism and the role unions play in the economic and political life of a community. The show will highlight and encourage people to join pro-worker organizations such as the Alliance for Retired Americans and Working America, both community organizations of the AFL-CIO.

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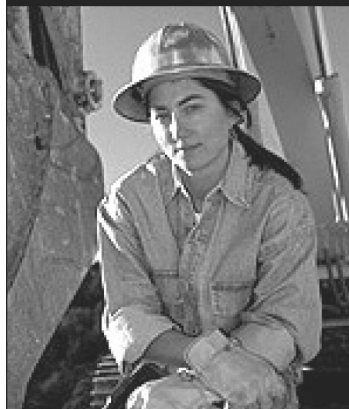
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