

"There is almost 100 percent dissatisfaction with the union"

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The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed Northwest Airlines workers in Detroit and Minneapolis to find out their reaction to the ongoing dispute.

A young member of the IAM in Detroit, a ground service worker, told the WSW, "They're making millions of dollars and not giving us a raise. The union is making promises, but they are not sticking behind their promises. The union was saying it would get us a raise and retroactive pay and a signing bonus, but it hasn't gotten any of it. There is almost 100 percent dissatisfaction with the union.

"In this contract they want to give us stock. If we wanted stock we could go out and buy it ourselves. It is not putting food on the table.

"There have been all kinds of guys fired for little BS stuff. We are not allowed to wear retro-pay buttons on our uniforms. Management is watching us like a hawk. They are getting rid of people right and left. I have a feeling they will be used as bargaining chips in negotiations."

A unionized (IAM) Northwest skycap in Detroit told the WSW that most of the skycaps, who assist travelers with luggage, were contract workers, making minimum wage, because of an agreement signed by the IAM. "The other guys don't have any insurance or benefits, just what they make in tips. The Northwest skycaps are being phased out, they are not hiring anyone. If someone dies or retires they fill the vacancy with contract personnel so they don't have to pay the higher wages and benefits.

"In the last contract we were sold out. The union even tells us that. It has become the norm for the airlines. Eventually they will contract out everything. I think it should be stopped altogether.

"It seems kind of silly to pay your union dues, and someone is working right beside you and has no benefits. If we went on strike they have our

replacements right here. We might never get our jobs back.

"Most of the workers here feel they have been working short-handed for a long time. Now they feel it is time to share in the profits. The only hiring that Northwest has done has been part-time workers. They are not willing to hire adequate manpower. The first reaction of the company to anything is 'fire, fire, fire.'"

An IAM mechanic in Minneapolis with one-year seniority told the WSW, "They have only one thing in mind, pressure people to work faster. And if they don't work—ship them out the door. Two of our guys were fired for taking too long to taxi a plane up to the gate. I think there were three or four mechanics fired for refusing to put a jetway up to a plane. That's a job for the ground crew. We're not trained for that. It would be like having a pilot turn a wrench.

"I'm coming up on my first year at Northwest. I happened to come in during the middle of the battle. I knew there was contract trouble when I first came here. Unfortunately you don't get the real picture until you are on the inside. When I got my first orientation one of the union guys came in to speak to us. He tried to strong-arm us. He told us about how the IAM had been on the property for a number of years and about how they were the strongest union, and so on. They told us that if we didn't have our initiation fees paid on time they'd start out by sending you a friendly letter. After that, they'd start coming down hard. I tested them out to see what kind of letter they would send me. The first letter I got threatened my job right off the bat. The initiation fees are incredibly high: \$150. That's what you pay for the right to continue paying \$41 a month for them to do nothing.

"You see, the union doesn't work for us. We work for the union, and they'll tell you that. The union

should never be on the board of directors with company heads. We might as well cut our heads off.”

A Northwest ground crew worker in Detroit with 23 years said, “I haven’t had a pay raise in 10 years. The pay cut we took in 1993 amounted to almost \$2 per hour. The stock they gave us amounted to only a small portion of the cut we took.

“What’s happening is that the public thinks we’re the bad guys, but we are not. We’re getting concerned over the fact that the IAM hasn’t done anything or said anything in the press. The union members are getting riled up. You can’t keep going backwards when the cost of living is going up.”

See Also:

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