

Minnesota governor calls for presidential intervention in Northwest strike

Kate Randall
5 September 1998

Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson formally appealed to the Clinton administration to intervene to end the strike by Northwest Airlines pilots that began one week ago, August 29. The Republican governor joined five other governors in states served by the airline in calling for action by Clinton. The National Mediation Board is scheduled to hold a meeting Saturday in Chicago with the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) and Northwest management. The dispute has shut down the nation's fourth-largest airline.

White House Deputy Press Secretary Barry Toiv said Clinton at present is steering clear of direct intervention, and that he feels, 'the best way to approach this is to keep the pressure on the parties to reach a settlement, and that is what we intend to do.' Under the 1926 Railway Labor Act, Clinton could call a 60-day 'cooling-off' period and appoint a presidential emergency board to recommend a settlement, such as he did in the 1997 American Airlines pilots strike.

At this point in the dispute, the White House is counting on the ALPA leadership to negotiate a settlement with Northwest, favorable to the airline. Northwest mechanics, ground crew and flight attendants are all without contracts. Northwest has laid off 27,000 of these workers as a result of the pilots strike, and is hoping that economic pressure will persuade them not to strike.

On Wednesday Clinton's Transportation Department ordered Northwest Airline's commuter Airlink affiliates--Mesaba and Express Airlines--to resume service to 17 small towns in 11 Midwestern and Southern states that have no other air service. The regional airlines, which serve smaller cities in the Midwest and Memphis, Tennessee areas, have been shut down by ALPA pilots in solidarity with the strike. Despite the pressure from Transportation Secretary

Slater, the regional airlines stated that they have no plans to resume service. A Mesaba spokesman said this would be 'economically disastrous. Eighty percent of our traffic connects to Northwest Airlines.'

Flight attendants at 14 airports served by Northwest held rallies Friday in support of the striking pilots. Detroit-area flight attendants, members of Teamsters Local 2000, rallied at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. Picketers carried signs reading: 'NOW! IT'S OUR TURN,' 'We Shared the PAIN Now Let's Share the GAIN,' as well as handwritten signs such as 'Will Work for Food.' Many held alarm clocks to signal a message to management that the time is up, as workers have been without a contract for two years.

However, the union officials offered no strategy to fight for a decent contract. Following brief introductory remarks by Bob Crabbe, a Detroit-based rep with Teamsters Local 2000, and other officials, the rally was turned over to a priest who read a 'unity prayer' and then led the workers in a chorus of 'Amen, Amen.'

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to flight attendants at the rally. One said: 'I volunteered with the United Farmworkers for 10 years and it's the same thing here. As much as they can squeeze out of the employees, they will.'

Reggie has been a flight attendant with Northwest for 11 years. 'I think the pilots' strike is just the tip of the iceberg. Someone had to set a precedent, and they are the ones. In 11 years it's only gotten worse. No one has any loyalty to the company. It's just a job. They just have no respect for the workers; all you are to them is a number.

'I think the union has been trying to work with the company. They trusted the company to give us something in 1993. We gave \$800 million pay concessions, and now they don't want to give us

anything.'

Meanwhile, Air Canada has announced that as a result of the three-day-old strike by its 2,100 pilots it is laying off 11,000 employees beginning midnight Friday. On Thursday, Cara Operations, which caters all Air Canada flights worldwide, laid off 1,000 employees, including some 600 who work in its kitchens at Toronto's Pearson International Airport, for the duration of the strike.

Air Canada, Canada's largest carrier, has canceled all its flights through Sunday, and further cancellations are all but inevitable as the airline says that it will take four to five days for normal operations to resume once the pilots return to work.

No negotiations are currently scheduled.

The strike is costing the airline an estimated \$13 million a day, which, according to the Air Canada Pilots Association, is considerably more than the difference on an annual basis between the pilots' demand for a 12 percent wage increase over two years and Air Canada's offer of 9 percent. The airline is clearly concerned about the impact of the pilots' wage demands on flight attendants and ground workers whose contracts will soon be coming up for renegotiation.

See Also:

The Northwest, Air Canada strikes and the globalization of the airline industry
[4 September 1998]



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact