

Teamsters suspend negotiating committee member for opposing concessions to Northwest Airlines

Cory Johnson
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The president of Teamsters Local 2000, representing 11,000 flight attendants involved in contract talks with Northwest Airlines, suspended Andy Damis, a member of the union's negotiating team, for revealing the local's contract proposals to union members.

Billie Davenport, president of the local and head of the negotiating team, charged that Andy Damis's decision to publish the union's contract proposals on the Internet undermined the negotiating team and broke a rule that proscribes the divulging of contract proposals before they have been presented to management. The local was to consider March 20 whether to permanently remove Damis from the bargaining committee.

In an open letter published on the Internet, Damis responded to his suspension: "The stated reason was that I had communicated with flight attendants about our union's bargaining position. Well, if that's a crime, then I plead guilty!"

Damis, with 14 years seniority at Northwest, emerged last year as one of the union members linked to a group that mobilized opposition to the Northwest Airlines' tentative agreement endorsed by Davenport and Teamsters International President James Hoffa. After flight attendants defeated the tentative agreement in a 69 percent rejection vote last fall, Damis was elevated to the negotiating committee to appease the militant mood among flight attendants.

In an interview with the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* Davenport admitted Damis was raised to the committee because he "had fairly good insights on what members wanted." But for the Teamsters bureaucracy, the appointment was to only serve as window dressing for a sellout.

Damis believes that the Teamsters leaders moved

quickly to reduce their contract demands in the wake of a company lawsuit stemming from an alleged New Year's sick-out. "We hid behind the lawsuit and threw a proposal together," Damis told the *Star-Tribune*. But Damis and another attendant refused to go along with the committee's proposal for concessions over contract sections dealing with hours of service, scheduling and reserves.

In his open letter Damis revealed, "I was told by two appointees of Hoffa that I was expected to sign an endorsement of these unenforceable sections or resign ... those running the negotiations don't want the majority's voice heard. They want a deal. The company wants to wear us down to give up and take a weak contract offer. Our union has to counter these corporate tactics, not play into them."

Davenport was also rankled when Damis advanced proposals of the opposition on his web site [<http://www.nwafa.org>] and encouraged flight attendants to sign on to an electronic petition supporting the demands. The negotiating committee released a statement that charged Damis's statement "randomly establishes a number of 'bottom line' positions and urges members to 'Just Say No' unless certain things are included in the final package.... None of these positions have been agreed to by the negotiations team."

The removal of Damis by the Teamsters is not the first bureaucratic reaction to the strivings of flight attendants for a better contract. When 21 flight attendants were cited in the lawsuit by Northwest over the alleged sick-out, two of them were associated with the opposition and sponsored web sites that provided rank-and-file flight attendants with information and

interaction about the contract. While the union provided legal assistance to 19 attendants, mostly low-level union officers, flight attendants Kevin Griffin and Ted Reeve were left to fend for themselves.



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