

Democratic-controlled Minneapolis City Council rejects resolution against Northwest Airlines union-busting

Our reporter
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Less than one week after a slew of state and local Democratic politicians made windy speeches about solidarity at an August 27th rally for striking Northwest Airlines mechanics at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, the phony nature of their “support” was exposed by another event.

On September 2, three members of the Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL—the Democratic Party in the state of Minnesota) who are members of the Minneapolis City Council introduced a resolution at a Council meeting to call for a negotiated end to the strike by 4,400 members of the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA).

The substance of the resolution was pathetic and would not in any material way aid the striking workers, whose jobs have been taken by strikebreakers and who have been betrayed by the other unions at the airline, all of which are crossing their picket lines. The resolution said, in part, that the city would “when reasonably possible and consistent with the city’s travel policies, attempt to find air transportation for its employees on another airline until the Northwest Airlines mechanics’ strike has ended.”

The resolution went down to defeat 8 to 5. The three DFL members who introduced the resolution were joined by two members of the Green Party. Opposing the resolution were seven DFLers and one independent. DFL council member Lisa Goodman, who hotly contested the resolution, was quoted by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* as calling it “a kick in the butt to Northwest Airlines.”

The resolution and the appearance of members of the DFL at the previous weekend’s rally represent at its lowest level the cynical grubbing for votes by capitalist politicians. At another level, it conformed to the traditional role of the DFL in Minnesota and the Democratic Party nationally, through its alliance with the AFL-CIO: to keep the discontent of the working class

within the safe channels of capitalist politics.

The majority of the DFLers on the council clearly saw even this toothless resolution as cutting across their function as servants of the corporate elite. Goodman went on to declare, “The thing I object to most of all is that it’s brought up in this arena in the first place.” In other words, the fate of workers who face the complete destruction of their living standards is not something that particularly interests her. Council President Paul Ostrow echoed this, saying the municipal body had “serious business to consider” and called the introduction of the resolution “ridiculous.”

DFL Councilman Don Samuels, who voted against the resolution, had initially been a sponsor. He explained his about-face by saying, “On closer examination, it became clear we were going to support a part of labor on something all of the labor unions are not supporting.”

The AFL-CIO has never forgiven Northwest mechanics for breaking with the AFL-CIO-affiliated International Association of Machinists (IAM) and hopes to expand its dues base by helping destroy AMFA and thereby obtaining the union franchise covering aircraft maintenance jobs at the airline. Neither the AFL-CIO nor the IAM bureaucracies could care less about the fate of the AMFA workers. Indeed, the same can be said about their own members. The defeat of the AMFA strike will, as the union officials well know, open the floodgates for ruthless job cuts and the gutting of wages, working conditions, health benefits and pensions.

Minnesota workers, like workers across the United States, have had a long and bitter experience with the combined strikebreaking of the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party. Most memorable in Minnesota were the two terms under DFL Governor Rudy Perpich, who dispatched the National Guard to break the strike by

UFCW Local P-9 at Hormel in 1985-86 in Austin. In 1989-91, Perpich used the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to frame up and jail wildcatting construction workers at Boise Cascade's paper mill in International Falls. In both strikes, the AFL-CIO carried out open strikebreaking against workers who refused to cave in to corporate attacks on their living standards and working conditions.

The incident at the Minneapolis City Council meeting is just one more indication of the need for the working class to establish its political independence from big business and the two-party system through the construction of its own political party, fighting against the US corporate elite on the basis of socialist policies.

On Labor Day, the WSWS spoke to striking mechanics about the Minneapolis City Council vote. A mechanic with 26 years at Northwest said, "It just doesn't seem like the Democrats are for the working guy. Last week at our rally they were shooting their mouths off, but they don't act on it. What they say depends on what audience is listening."

Another veteran mechanic said, "We don't have any friends in Washington, D.C. We don't have any government politicians or union officials who are standing behind us. We're out here on our own. But I have no second thoughts about what I'm doing. Sometimes you have to stand for what you believe in, regardless. I'm taking a huge hit here, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

"While the union officials are against us, it's different with the rank and file. We've had Teamster members come out here and show support. They told us they've been calling their union officials, but the officials don't return their calls. It's falling on deaf ears. The union leaders aren't doing anything.

"The AFL-CIO is nothing but a big business. That's all they are. And they wonder why unionism is dying."



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