

American Airlines flight attendants overwhelmingly vote for strike authorization

Chase Lawrence
5 September 2023

Flight attendants at Texas-based American Airlines held informational pickets at 12 airports in the US following a vote by 26,000 flight attendants, who authorized a strike by an overwhelming 99 percent margin. Flight attendants have been kept on the job since December 2019, when the old contract became “amendable,” by the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA) bureaucracy without receiving any pay raise. Meanwhile, attendants have faced insulting and dangerous working conditions, including deaths and mass infection by COVID-19, poisoning by toxic uniforms, and no pay when aircraft are boarding.

Other sections of airline workers are also pushing for new contracts. Pilots at Southwest Airlines and flight attendants at United Airlines picketed at airports on Thursday.

American justified keeping workers on the job without a new contract under the pretext of pandemic hardship, and the union bureaucracy did nothing to challenge this.

The APFA bureaucracy, as it did with flight attendants at Southwest and United, will use the anti-democratic provisions of the reactionary Railway Labor Act as an excuse to strip workers of the right to strike and tie them up in an endless loop of government mediation that can even result in the US Congress imposing a pro-company contract, as it did last year with railway workers.

The airline industry received a multi-billion-dollar bailout under the pandemic CARES Act legislation, following massive stock buybacks and lucrative CEO pay packages. The government handout went into the pockets of management and stockholders while the airlines laid off over 80,000 workers.

American has \$30.7 billion in debt, making it the most leveraged US carrier, and is planning a

restructuring. It paid out over \$2.1 billion in debt payments in 2022 alone.

It plans to reduce total debt by \$15 billion by the end of 2025. This didn’t stop CEO Robert Isom from pocketing \$4.89 million in 2022, nearly 70 times the pay of the median AA worker, which sits at \$71,655 according to the *Dallas News*. His predecessor made \$7.24 million in 2021 and as chairman made \$10.6 million in 2022.

Following the strike authorization, APFA held small rallies around the country at various airports including Boston, Charlotte, Washington National, NYC-LaGuardia, Orlando, Miami, Philadelphia, Chicago/O’Hare, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Phoenix.

The aim of these rallies is to burn off steam while the union plots behind workers’ backs with the company.

One such rally was held at the D terminal of Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, in an area cordoned off by a significant contingent of police.

The rally was highly controlled by the bureaucracy, with around one bureaucrat for every four workers. Many workers told the WSWs reporting team they couldn’t say anything because the union forbade them from talking to media.

While workers were not allowed to speak for themselves, the union was more than willing to provide its spin at a press conference for the corporate media.

Despite the intimidation by APFA, a few workers spoke to the WSWs, explaining that among their demands are boarding pay, cost of living and profit sharing. AA flight attendants do not receive boarding pay, even if there is a multi-hour delay workers are not paid, meaning that the company is basically extracting free labor. Management gets the largest share of profits at 60 percent while workers get under 2 percent through

so-called profit sharing.

Much of the rally consisted of chanting reminiscent of a high school pep-rally, like, “Ay ay oh oh, corporate greed has got to go,” and “Everywhere we go, people want to know who we are, We are the union, the mighty mighty union” and “What do we want, contract, when do we want it, now.”

From what this reporter saw, there was no evidence of any attempt by union officials to explain the political substance of the conflict workers are finding themselves in this contract, nor who their friends or enemies are. This is, of course, because the bureaucrats are working to block a real fight and force workers to submit to management’s agenda.

Not only do workers find themselves in a struggle against multi-billion dollar corporations, but also against the Democratic and Republican parties. American Airlines has donated over \$1.4 million in the 2022 election cycle, roughly split between Democrats and Republicans, and \$4.9 million in lobbying in 2022. Charles “Chuck” Schumer, Democratic Senate leader, received upward of \$76,000 from American Airlines, with the next largest recipient being the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

Workers also confront the trade union bureaucracy, which is itself bound by a million threads to the Democratic Party, the US financial oligarchy and the capitalist state which exists to guarantee the latter’s survival. If flight attendants are to win their demands they will have to form rank-and-file committees independent of these forces, and reach out to their class brothers and sisters among the different sections of airline workers, in other airlines and the international working class more broadly.



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