

09 October 2009

Dear Detroit News ~

Twice in as many weeks, an editorial that reads more like a page from a union-busting playbook . . .

"If they get what they're asking for, it would have a tremendous negative impact on the transportation industry in this country."

You never really qualified this statement. What does it mean? How would workers collectively bargaining for their work rules and wages have a negative impact on the transportation industry? If you suggest that union wages would be higher than non-union, you might be right. Is that a terrible thing? Your insinuation of a negative impact to the industry perpetuates the "race for the bottom" mentality this country has developed when it comes to wages. You state later in your editorial that the "impact" will be higher costs for an industry already struggling to stay out of bankruptcy, etc.. What about prudent business decisions that keep corporations out of bankruptcy in the first place? When the ink turns red, why has it become habitual to attack the frontline employees and suggest, "They're making too much money again! They're putting us into bankruptcy!"? Credit where credit is due: Decisions in the boardroom have implications on the bottom line, not employees choosing representation.

"While the board is considering the rule request, it is holding up a unionization election at Delta Airlines, which recently merged with Northwest. Detroit Metropolitan Airport is a major site of the merged airline operation."

Which Delta timeline are you using to calculate a delay? The flight attendants at Delta requested a determination of single-carrier status from the Board on 27 July 2009. Those requests have historically taken around 4 months. There is no election delay since there is no election at this time. Furthermore, the petition from the Transportation Trade Department of the AFL-CIO to the NMB asks for a *global change* to the representational election ballot procedure - not just for elections at Delta. The NMB oversees all railway and airline labor elections. Insinuating political posturing might be an interesting argument if I could find similar arguments related to an airline wanting to rush a vote under a more corporate-friendly NMB.

"The transportation unions have every right to seek to unionize the workers, but the elections should take place under the rules that have been in place for three-quarters of a century."

Using this same logic, would your author propose a return to other long-standing practices of past eras, when women were not allowed to vote, flight attendants had to retire at age 30 and Jim Crow laws, segregation in schools and the military were the rule of the day?

Vigorous and blatant union-busting campaigns on the part of corporations have helped build a case for using a democratic Yes/No style ballot. Delta has waged a strong campaign of voter suppression in previous elections that went unnoticed by the Bush appointed National Mediation Board. Management urged flight attendants to tear up their ballots, barraging them with "Give It a Rip" posters and anti-union videos. Ironically, the company belabors talk of representation so much that confusion prevails and, under the current voting procedure, those who fail to return a vote have effectively voted "no." It's also interesting to note that at the conclusion of the election, the company reports results as if there had been 100% voter turnout in a more traditional election: "...a decisive majority – more than 60% - of eligible flight attendants rejected representation..." Under the current policy, that means that 60% simply didn't vote after months of suppression and fear tactics brought on by the company.

"-- even if the total of employees voting in favor in the election represent less than half of all workers."

Those who participate in the process have their votes counted and the majority rules. How is that different than other elections in a democratic nation? Northwest flight attendants have historically voted in record numbers in favor to keep union representation, and thousands of Delta flight attendants support collective bargaining. Presupposing low turnout is purely conjectural at this juncture.

"The board's composition has changed with the election of President Barack Obama, so the unions stand a good chance of prevailing."

I'm trying to find the Detroit News Editorial that suggests the same political posturing during the Bush administration. Maybe it went along with the article that talked about Delta's insistence that unions vote sooner than later, perhaps to coincide with a Bush appointed NMB?

Elections in our country are consequential. Years of a shrinking middle class and contempt for collective bargaining don't appear to have moved us forward very much as a society or economically . . .

"The association representing the airlines makes the point that the board has previously denied its own authority to change the rules and has on several occasions denied similar requests."

Just because you haven't capitalized the "a" in association doesn't mean it isn't the same idea. The ATA is the Air Transport Association, which represents the collective needs and wants of major air carriers. The ATA works to progress the business of airlines through legislation, negotiations with airports and related business, and generally speaks for the airlines of the nation. In a related spirit of unity, the Association of Flight Attendants - CWA (AFA) is the union that represents flight attendants at Northwest (Delta) Airlines. AFA recently filed for single carrier designation with the NMB to trigger a representational election. AFA represents flight attendants for over 20 airlines

and works to progress the flight attendant profession by legislation, negotiations, and collaboration with their respective carriers. Simply put, ATA is the collective voice of the corporation. AFA is the collective voice of the frontline flight attendants.

Organizing a very mobile group of over 20,000 flight attendants is an enormous task. The flight attendants at Northwest recently recognized 62 years of collective bargaining. Flight attendants from Delta and Northwest now comprise the New Delta and one of its largest bases is in Detroit. For the thousands of us who want representation at the world's largest airline, the possibility of a democratic ballot where an individual's vote will count is a welcomed change. As frontline safety and service professionals, we want the same opportunity as pilots and other work groups: To sit down with Delta to negotiate a legally binding contract that preserves jobs and provides wages and work rules befitting a world-class carrier.

Sincerely,
Daniel Grey,
Detroit Based Delta Flight Attendant