



Solidarity Speaks Volumes

By Capt. John Prater, ALPA President



By the time you read this, our Spirit and Jazz brothers and sisters may have been forced to make the difficult decision to strike.

Let's be clear: no one wants to strike—it's the absolute last resort. But it's the price our fellow pilots and their families are willing to pay to secure the contracts we deserve, contracts befitting our honorable profession.

Twenty-seven years ago, I was in their shoes. I was a few numbers from the bottom of the seniority list after being recalled from furlough just a few weeks before Continental's Chapter 11 filing and just 3 months after the merged Continental and Texas International list was finished. The post-merger Master Executive Council declared a strike 7 days after management unilaterally abrogated our contract along with our seniority rights.

I have never forgotten the support and selfless sacrifices of fellow ALPA members and staff. I have great admiration for fellow strikers—from management pilots who chose to hold the line with line pilots to union leaders like Bob Kehs, the strike czar at Northwest, and Ray Lysen, a vocal Wien pilot rep who helped rally the pilots throughout their 653-day strike and the thousands of pilots who answered their union's call for solidarity. My family and fellow strikers will never forget the strike support we received from ALPA members—from the highest-paid international pilots to the commuter pilots who faithfully paid strike benefits even though far too many were earning substandard wages.

Twenty months later, the United pilots struck in May 1985, and 5 months later the Continental strike ended in a bankruptcy court. ALPA members did not flinch. I can tell you that solidarity speaks volumes, and today, once again, our pilots are sending that message loud and clear.

In the past several weeks, ALPA members at several airlines have conducted strike authorization votes, hosted informational picketing events, and ramped up for the negotiations endgame, doing whatever it takes to get the fair contract that our pilots deserve.

Spirit pilots made good on their strike authorization vote, and as the 30-day cooling-off period ticked by, they were holding informational picketing events across the nation and peppering their hub cities with billboards that warn their customers of the pending labor situation. In a symbolic demonstration of support from all 53,000 ALPA pilots, the union's Board of Directors is currently voting to authorize strike benefit funding.

In late May, 99 percent of the Jazz pilots who voted granted their union the right to call a strike. The pilots' solidarity helped garner news-media attention and demonstrated to management the pilot group's unified resolve.

Jazz pilots used their 21-day cooling-off period to get their Toronto-based national strike center up and running, fine-tune their pilots' news-media interview techniques, and reach out to the minister of labour and the Canadian Labour Congress, who both stand ready to help our pilots north of the border reach an agreement.

In May, a resounding 97.5 percent of AirTran pilots voted in favor of a strike. F/O Linden Hillman, the pilots' MEC chairman, carried our message to the Board and AirTran

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shareholders, declaring that his pilot group is unified and will do what it takes to achieve a fair contract. All and all, our message was heard, and these pilots illustrated that yet another strong, unified ALPA pilot group is ready to take on its management to negotiate a new contract. And let's not forget our Trans States and Pinnacle pilots, who have also demonstrated their resolve and are prepared to fight for the contracts they deserve.

I know we will succeed in these contract battles, because we have the proof in hand. MEC leaders at Alaska and Hawaiian, with help from ALPA's "toolbox," executed strategic plans with their strike and negotiating teams to lead the Association into a new negotiations cycle in which we're breaking through bankruptcy-era contracts with positive gains.

I know that we will build on the contract gains of our brothers and sisters by following in their footsteps. We will not allow management to pit us against each other. If a contract is not reached and our brothers and sisters strike, we will be here to support them: on the line, in our homes, in our thoughts, and, yes, with strike benefits from each of us. They will not be in this alone. With full support from 53,000 ALPA members, our Jazz and Spirit members will last one day longer than their managements. Believe me, I know.