

The sun was full-bore in Washington, D.C., the weather almost balmy. Cincinnati, Ohio, was stone cold, and snow crunched underfoot. In Bloomington, Minn., and Milwaukee, Wisc., the venues were indoors. But the will and energy were the same everywhere that week: airline pilots standing with tens of thousands of other union members to say that they will not lie down while their rights are trampled in today's anti-worker environment.

In response to a call by ALPA's president, Capt. Duane Woerth, ALPA pilots and staff came out in force for street rallies organized worldwide by the AFL-CIO during the week leading up to International Human Rights Day on Dec. 10, 2005. The date marked the anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes the right to form unions.

Capt. Woerth participated in two of the rallies—with pilots from Continental, Delta, FedEx, Northwest, Polar, United, and US Airways in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 8, 2005, and with ASTAR, Comair, and Delta pilots in Cincinnati on December 9. The Bloomington event was an all-Northwest Airlines union rally at the

Ramada Mall of America on December 7. In Milwaukee, Midwest Airlines pilots joined 400 people from a variety of unions in speeches and stories of union-building and union-busting.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, with the help of his executive board, including Capt. Woerth, organized the event to take place throughout America. "In light of the way things are going in America for the trade union movement, we've got to get back out into the streets, in the old-fashioned way," Capt. Woerth said.

"Any time you want to force change in the political process, you can't just e-mail, or write letters, or gripe in your small circles in the cockpit or the crew room. I've said it over and over again: Democracy is not a spectator sport. Democracy demands street action, and you can't just do it in Washington, D.C. You need to be out to get local [news] media coverage, to make your local politicians—whether they be the mayor or the governor or the members of Congress who come back to Washington—see people marching in their own streets and interviewing in their own local newspapers. Then they will begin to understand it is not just a Beltway issue. This is something that is going on out in the heartland."

Worker rights in jeopardy are manifold, and they range across the board for the entire labor movement, from the right to organize to the right to retain benefits already bargained for. Many of the speakers urged passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, federal legislation that would allow workers to form unions after a majority has signed authorization cards.

The ALPA pilots and staff carried signs shaped like shields with ALPA logos on one side and broadcasting the Association's current issues with three-word slogans on the flip sides: "Honor Our Contract." "Protect My Retirement." "Hold CEOs Accountable." "No Foreign Ownership." "End Bankruptcy Abuse." Pilots have learned that the philosophies of leaders and politicians fuel their decisions—decisions that have positive or negative outcomes for pilots—and now is the time to hold the administration, CEOs, bankruptcy judges, and Congress accountable for their actions.

Washington, D.C.

Hundreds of demonstrators—airline pilots, teachers, government workers, communications workers, building trades workers—rallied in front of the AFL-CIO building and then marched



BILL BURKE, PAGE ONE PHOTOGRAPHY

to the White House to present a petition to President Bush to support workers' freedom to form a union. The petition was refused.

Capt. Chris Baker, the FedEx MEC secretary-treasurer, who came from Memphis to join the rally, said in an interview afterward, "When the march leaders took that petition to the front gate of the White House and they wouldn't accept it, that shed a whole new light on what our country has become.

"I'm seeing that to achieve things, we have to become active, to put ourselves out," he said. "It may be inconvenient, but it has to be done. That this was a rally involving many different labor sectors was attractive to me. We get so myopic, looking just at pilot groups, but this issue is much broader, it's a labor issue. I felt good doing something positive not just for me, not just for pilots, but for America."

Capt. Bill Pollock, US Airways MEC chairman, concurred in a recent interview. "It was a great opportunity to hear not only from Duane [Woerth], but also from other union presidents who have their own unique viewpoint on what is happening to labor.

"For US Airways pilots, in the last three years we've had two bankruptcies and three painful rounds of negotiations, which extracted our pensions and benefits while we watched short-term executives walk away with millions. We saw the heavy hand of the Bush administration using government agencies to force us to give up things you wouldn't think we would have to give up in a country that purports to honor family values. Pensions that pilots had already earned were forced to be terminated.

"The message from the rally was that we do stand shoulder-to-shoulder with workers across America, and not just organized workers, but workers everywhere who also face the possibility of waking up to the loss of their pensions and healthcare benefits," Capt. Pollock said. "As long as this onslaught is coming from the administration, I hope we're ready to take our message to the streets."

First Officer Kate Malone, the newly elected secretary-treasurer of Continental's Newark council and a long-time grievance representative for her



ALPA pilots marching through the streets of Cincinnati, Ohio, include Capt. Duane Woerth (center) with, from left to right, S/O Ted Thilly, ASTAR MEC secretary-treasurer; F/O Brendan Harkin (Comair); Capt. J.C. Lawson, Comair MEC chairman; and Capt. William Baker (Comair).

base, came down to D.C. for the march.

"I viewed this rally in front of President Bush's place of work as a chance to call attention to the erosion of workers' rights," she told *Air Line Pilot*. "I was there particularly on behalf of my pilot group. To work with the management team to save our airline, we just signed a concessionary contract, and that agreement has already been violated. It's very discouraging.

"Being at the rally provided an energizing force and a realization that there really is strength in numbers," F/O Malone said. "Even though not a lot of Continental pilots were there, I hope that in the coming year we can build up that momentum. I believe that labor is under attack, and we need to take back the things we have lost, things that our predecessors, including many of the pilots I fly with, had already fought for and won."

Capt. Woerth told the assembled crowd, "When ALPA's founders first came together to form this Association back in 1931, they had to meet secretly and hide their identities for fear of reprisal. . . .

"Seventy-five years later, we're seeing management, including in our industry, use many of those same tactics—a situation fostered by our government's obvious lack of regard for the rights of workers, as evidenced here today. If we have any hope of preserving those rights, we must have the courage to stand together with our

brothers and sisters and fight to protect those rights."

Cincinnati, Ohio

The temperature was about 12 degrees F, with snow the night before, but that didn't deter about 200 union members—pilots, steelworkers, construction workers, janitors—from gathering at noon in Piatt Park and marching to City Hall, the Delta call center, and the head office of a janitorial service to make their point about workers' rights.

Capt. J.C. Lawson, chairman of the Comair MEC and ALPA executive vice-president, and Capt. Woerth both spoke to the crowd, covered by most of the major news media in Cincinnati.

"I liked that we were with other labor groups and that both Delta and Comair pilots were there," Capt. Lawson said in an interview. "As I said in my speech in front of the Delta call center, the uniforms are different but the issues are the same. There's a wave in this country that we're not in control of. This property [Comair] is stealing, in effect, and they seem to have free rein to do that.

"I want to give Duane [Woerth] credit, he really started it off," Capt. Lawson said. "He was in their face, and in the end so was I, and so were the other union leaders, because it's a passionate subject."

Capt. Buzz Hazzard, vice-chairman of the Delta MEC's Communications

Committee, coordinated with the AFL-CIO's Bridget Doherty to help organize the rally here. "When I told her Duane Woerth was coming, she was excited that the president of our national union would show up. This isn't much of a union town, frankly, and the support was a shot in the arm."

"The importance of the event was getting everybody to realize that all these organizations are under the bigger umbrella of labor, from the janitors who are not making much more than minimum wage to the airline pilots who are nearer the other end of the spectrum," Capt. Hazzard said. "It was a time of union building. I heard the steelworkers and the janitors were very responsive to Duane's words: We are all labor."

Milwaukee, Wisc.

More than 400 workers, including pilots from Midwest Airlines, gathered at American Serb Hall to hear, firsthand, stories of obstructions and challenges to organizing.

First Officer Craig Moffatt (Midwest) told how anti-union rhetoric remained in company publications long after ALPA had come on the property, and then his own story: a combat veteran with 12,000 hours of flying time, he had worked for Midwest for 6 years with no problems, when he suddenly was told he had failed a checkride and was subsequently fired. He had previously served as

ALPA's negotiating chairman at the airline.

"It feels like your world has been torn asunder," he said, adding that "organizing is not for the weak. It's Hardball 101." After years of going through the courts just to compel management into contract-required arbitration, he was ultimately restored to his former position. F/O Moffatt said

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—Capt. Duane Woerth, ALPA President

later during an interview, "I would say to a guy who is down on his union that, in my specific case, the MEC was very faithful—to me personally, to my cause, and to enforcing the contract. And it ultimately salvaged my career."

After stories from a hospital worker, a migrant worker, a school bus driver, and an engineer, among others, the evening ended with the singing of "Solidarity Forever" and adjourning to the back of the ballroom for hot wings and cheese, courtesy of ALPA. "The blue-collar guys went to the bar and drank beer," reported ALPA Communications Specialist Rusty Ayers. "Our uniformed ALPA guys drank Diet Cokes."

Capt. Jay Schnedorf, Midwest MEC chairman and ALPA executive vice-president, said in an interview before the rally that bringing ALPA onto the property was accomplished "through a lot of hard, dedicated work and a lot of sacrifice, personal sacrifice" by pilots who were slandered, harassed, and even intimidated with subtle and not-so-subtle threats of being fired during the organizing effort.

Bloomington, Minn.

The Northwest Airlines rally was a cooperative effort that began when Machinists President Bobby DePace called the Northwest MEC chairman, Capt. Mark McClain, about taking action to protest management's attempt to use the bankruptcy process to outsource thousands of jobs. They planned a rally that was timed perfectly with broader AFL-CIO events.

About 300 fired-up Northwest employees from ALPA, the International Association of Machinists, the Professional Flight Attendants Association, the Aircraft Technical Support Association, the Northwest Airlines Meteorology Association, and the Transport Workers Union attended the rally in the Ramada's convention center.

Management has proposed to

outsource 70- to 100-seat flying to a subsidiary, to replace current DC-9 flying. Capt. McClain, who was interviewed by major newspapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul, as well as the Associated Press and Minnesota Public Radio, said, "A well-employed working class has been the backbone of this nation. This continued assault on working America tears at the very fabric of our society."

"Northwest pilots have already given \$480 million in annual concessions since December 2004," he said. "That includes two separate pay cuts totaling 39 percent. Northwest pilots' historic sacrifices over the past two years were made to help Northwest, to bring more jobs back to Northwest, not to start a new company that could be sold, along with those jobs, in the near future."

Looking ahead

Capt. Woerth, looking back recently on the week of rallies, began looking ahead: "From the Colonial period until now, people have taken to the streets, whether it was the Boston Tea Party or a march for voting rights, to get people's attention, to force action."

"The event in December 2005 wasn't the end of an idea," he said, "it was the beginning, and we're going to have more rallies throughout the spring, summer, and fall, leading up to the congressional elections, to effect positive change." 🌀

Communications Specialists Rusty Ayers and Will Holman contributed to this story.



Midwest Airlines MEC chairman, Capt. Jay Schnedorf, right, gets acquainted with a union steelworker during the Milwaukee rally.