

Jewish Labor Committee

JLC

יידישער אַרבעטער-קאָמיטעט

September 1, 2010

To the working men and women of Delta Air Lines:

The Jewish Labor Committee wholeheartedly supports the campaign of flight attendants of Delta Air Lines to secure the benefits of union membership, primarily for collective bargaining purposes [to secure an acceptable contract that is binding on both management and employees], but also for the range of benefits of membership in a union. It was a hard-fought battle to secure the right to form a union and join a union. And this right has to be exercised in every generation, lest it be lost.

In the United States and in many countries, Jews played significant roles in these struggles. We remember very well that it was the labor movement that secured many of the basic worker rights that we now enjoy. It was as a result of membership in a range of unions that working-class Jewish immigrants and their children were able to see their communities move into the middle-class, and achieve many things as individuals, families, and communities that would have been virtually impossible without such things as better wages, Social Security, decent working conditions, health insurance, and a range of benefits that the labor movement secured.

And it was the labor movement that secured legal representational elections for airline employees that would be supervised by the National Mediation Board, just as the labor movement was able to secure the formation of the National Labor Relations Board.

The American Jewish community's roots going back to the late 19th century and early 20th century are intertwined with that of the U.S. labor movement, most notably in the garment workers unions, such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. We've participated in and often were leading figures in strikes and organizing campaigns, from the effort of clothing workers in New York's Lower East Side to secure union membership, to the campaigns of those who harvest the grapes, lettuce, strawberries and even mushrooms to be able to join unions, and negotiate meaningful contracts.

It is no accident that people who make the beds in hotels, who pick the tomatoes in our fast food, who teach our children and who attend to our elderly parents all have worked hard to get to be members of unions. With a union, they have a voice at work, and a chance to balance the power of the management, whether it be of a small company, the government, or a massive air line.

Jewish texts from the Five Book of Moses through recent rabbinic commentaries have supported the rights of workers, including the right to form and join a union. And Jews have continued to support -- in writing, in religious pronouncement, and by hitting the pavement -- this essential right. Secular as well as religious, Jews have often cast their support for this precious right. The right to be represented by the union of your choice.

Sadly, when working men and women try to secure their rights, they are often the target of massive anti-union campaigns. This is now the situation, we understand, confronting Delta flight attendants.

We understand that about 100 Delta flight attendants were hired when the air line started to fly to Ben-Gurion International Airport in Israel . Please note that the flight attendants of EL AL, Israel's national carrier, have secured the benefits of unionization – the union that defends their interests in negotiations with management is part of the Histadrut, Israel's General Federation of Labor - just as the Association of Flight Attendants is part of the United States's AFL-CIO.

Having a legally binding contract in the workplace is the foundation of what unions work to accomplish, but there is so much more than that. Unionized workers have better pay, better hours – and they have the strength of someone behind them when problems arise, whether just one person's, an entire flight crew's, or the entire workforce.

We in the Jewish Labor Committee have found that, over the years, the labor movement and the community-at-large share so many concerns, and so many hopes for the future, that we have committed our energies to helping the labor movement and the Jewish community work together whenever possible. It is with the accumulated experience of over 75 years that we write, and hope that you make a wise decision during this important vote. It will not only be a major factor in your life at work, it will also affect flight attendants in other airlines, and not just now, but for years to come.

Sincerely,

Stuart Appelbaum

President

Martin Schwartz

Executive Director