

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE
NATIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS ASSOCIATION
MEBA - AFL/CIO
FOUNDING CONVENTION
Chicago, Illinois
September 23 & 24, 1986

*Fraternally,
M. Palumbo*

The Founding Convention of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, MEBA - AFL/CIO, was called to order Tuesday, September 23, 1986 at approximately 0900, Mr. John F. Thornton, National Coordinator, presiding. In a brief opening statement he explained that we now have over 4,200 signatures and will file our initial petition with the FLRA very soon. This slight delay will allow the remaining few AFGE supporters to rally with us. He noted that NATCA has, to date, testified before four Congressional Committees. Mr. Thornton extended our heartfelt thanks to the many distinguished guests and supporters present.

Mr. Alan Brotsky, Attorney of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, accepted the position of acting Parliamentarian. The twelve point rules to govern this Founding Convention were read and submitted for adoption.

There has been no representation for Air Traffic Control Specialists since 1981. Mr. Thornton introduced the other members of the NATCA Executive Board and each Regional Representative, in turn, presented a brief introductory statement. These Regional Representatives include: Howie Barte (New England), Steve Bell (Eastern), Dennis Delaney (Southern), Gary Molen (Northwest Mountain), Jim Poole (Central - 90 day temporary), Fred Gilbert (Great Lakes), Ed Mullin (Southwest), Karl Grundmann (Western Pacific), and Joe Dennigan (Alaska) - Will Saville (Alternate - in - attendance). Emphasis was placed on the fact that NATCA is an organization OF/FOR/BY Controllers.

A highly supportive telegram from Senator Jim Exxon, ranking minority member of the House Aviation Subcommittee, was presented and read.

In the initial portion of the counsel report, Mr. Joe Cort quoted Section 701 of the Federal Labor Relations Statute and explained that Federal Law absolutely favors collective bargaining in the workplace, emphasising the term collective action. He continued in explanation of the procedural steps in the notification postings and defining of the bargaining unit, after we initially file our petition with the FLRA.

Mr. Angelo Arcadipone, Labor Attorney for MEBA and NATCA Special Counsel, stressed our primary goal - that of organizing and, thusly, having the opportunity to act collectively. He discussed the collective bargaining agreement, the rules and regulations document by which we will work, and the third-party arbitration procedure if we feel these rules are breached. He stressed the importance of controller/membership involvement, as policies will be decided by the elected representatives and all members.

Mr. C. E. DeFries, President of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, was the next distinguished speaker to welcome us heartily. A review of past gains through union representation was concluded. He stated, "... history has taught us you have to stay within the system." Any possible differences must be settled through the system. In closing, Mr. DeFries emphasized MEBAs dedication and promised their continuing support and assistance in our organizing efforts.

Our next guest speaker was Mr. John F. Leyden representing the AFL/CIO, Public Employees' Department, Director of the Federal/Postal Division. Mr. Leyden spoke of the positive aspects and benefits concluded by the former organization. These include overtime pay, the SF160 program, an increase in grade for nearly 90% of the controller workforce and the early retirement system. He noted that, in the past, trained controllers from every ~~station~~ were members of the NTSB investigation teams and were automatically released to assist when accidents occurred.

Mr. Leyden emphasized that we must profit from experience and went on to say that "confrontation is a part of the past". He believes we must organize and that one of our first priorities should be to insure effective legislation. He personally favors hiring some of the fired controllers, considering them "political hostages", as many would like to return to our profession and there is an immediate need for relief in many busier facilities.

He opposes privatization but would support a move for a quasi-governmental organization similar to the U.S. Post Office. He spoke of an upcoming board meeting of representatives of thirteen Federal employee organizations about mandatory drug testing, and would prefer that more safeguards be imposed. He believes we will receive a 3% pay increase and was disappointed that retirees "lost out" in July. In closing, Mr. Leyden stated that he is fully supportive of NATCA, wishes us well in our organizing drive, and reiterated his hopes that we have learned from the past.

The afternoon session was closed to the press and began with an open period of discussion. Among the numerous topics were drug testing and recent accident investigations.

An officially recognized bargaining unit has the right to receive all pertinent information, whereas individuals are limited under the Freedom of Information Act.

A recent Executive Order details drug testing, including the type of test to be given and the usage of a second confirmatory test, more expensive and accurate. No use is to be made of the first test, or its results published, if the confirmatory test results are negative.

Representative Guy Molinari placed a personal congratulatory telephone call to NATCA. He told of his support and spoke of questions from Mr. Dan Rather, inquiring about the need for an air traffic union. His reply was absolutely. Representative Molinari also stated that our NO STRIKE pledge has given us extreme credibility on Capitol Hill.

The report of the Regional Caucuses on the NATCA National Dues Structure was the next item on the agenda. The common consensus was to adopt a figure of one percent of our base pay grade, step one.

Mr. Leon Shapiro, MEBA (Ret), spoke of the legislative process an organization must engage in to protect its members. He advised that the price we must pay is that once we begin something, we can never give it up. He told of Political Action Committees (PACs) and the steps of legislative passage, from initiation through to final passage.

After copies of the draft constitution were distributed to all members present, regional discussion groups reviewed the entire document. A resolution was adopted that a committee consisting of one member per region, to be appointed by each Regional Representative, shall be formed to study and recommend changes, these being timely amendments in accordance with the provisions of Article XI, Section 2.

The NATCA Constitution was then UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED!

The meeting was adjourned until 9:00, Wednesday, September 24, 1986.

The guest speaker at the banquet held that night was Congressman James Oberstar, the Chairman of the Public Works and Transportation Subcommittee on Investigation and Oversight. As with so many others, his moving speech included themes of support for NATCA and the importance and need of organizing.

A second hospitality suite was again hosted Tuesday night by the Professional Airways Systems Specialists (PASS).

Mr. Howard Johannssen, President, Professional Airways Systems Specialists (PASS), was the first speaker on Wednesday. He discussed the trust we have placed in our leadership and the need to continue to do so. The necessary system of checks and balances we have adopted should not limit our leaders. We are here because we lack a sense of complete trust in the FAA and, he asserts, as PATCO is a part of history, we should make no apologies for their actions. He too stressed the importance of organization.

Mr. William H. Brett, Assistant General Secretary of the Institute of Professional Civil Servants (United Kingdom), was our next guest speaker. He stated that although their ICAO rules and labor laws under the Civil Aviation Authority differ from ours, that many of the problems are the same. He re-emphasized their strong position of support, the initial statement in a letter dated 7 July 86. Their group is made up of nearly 5,000 persons in aviation fields including pilots, engineers and 1,350 of the 1,500 controllers in the U.K. Once again, the need for us to group together as a single entity was a major theme. Mr. Brett presented NATCA through John Thornton, three gifts. The first was a book about the history of their labor organization for a future NATCA library, the second an engraved ashtray, and the third a symbolic pen, requesting a promise that it will be used in signing our first NATCA contract.

Mr. Bruce Henry, President, National Association of Air Traffic Specialists (NAATS), spoke of the desirability of representation. He further stated that since we have the RIGHT to organize, there should be NO fear of reprisals. Our union can and will help the FAA. He stressed that we must guarantee fair and equal treatment for all controllers, members as well as those who do not initially care to join with us. Privatization and automation proposals were also discussed.

Mr. Jack Butt, President of the Canadian Air Traffic Control Association (CATCA), briefly discussed his organization representing all civil atc's, including supervisory and training personnel. He compared, in precise detail, the astounding parallel courses of decisions/results made by the Canadian Department of Transport and our own FAA. In 1984 a policy of deregulation was announced. Reductions in funding included atc. Twenty percent of their workforce was pulled from the boards in Oct. '85 and these "excessive" controllers sat in breakrooms. The immediate result was flow control and user delays. This policy has since been reviewed and the number of controllers increased twice. Even so, there are still 15% fewer now than in 1983.

Mr. Butt further advised that two positions are being worked by one controller, that they are working entirely too much traffic, and that excessive time is spent on position without sufficient break periods. Supervisors have been forced to control traffic instead of performing supervisory functions. Many Canadian Controllers are close to retirement, yet their hiring is at a standstill. He discussed decommissioning of towers, other proposed closures, and told of a projected steady increase in air traffic. He concluded that "Economic choices were greater than safety", and closed with an emphatic statement of CATCA support.

Mr. John Sheehan, Senior Vice President for Government and Technical Affairs of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), has been a pilot for nearly thirty years and was a CATTC Controller in the USN. The AOPA has 260,000 members including 14,000 airline pilots, members owning 130 of the 220 thousand general aviation aircraft. Common interests shared with controllers include safety and efficiency. He hopes we would all support the "Fly-A-Controller" program and encouraged us to get the "Operation Raincheck" program reinstated at our facilities. He affirmed that a "single loud voice" is required on Capitol Hill.

In response to a petition by the Air Transport Association three months ago, he feels that transponder equipment with Mode C should be mandatory in certain traffic areas such as TCAs, but sees no major need enroute. He requested a review of FAR Part 61 for pilot requirements and feels that pilots must know the rules and regs. of an area they want to fly in, or be excluded.

Mr. Sheehan endorses the issuance of violations for significant airspace/procedural infractions. He proposed support training and premium insurance rates for those low-time pilots who enroll in the recurrent programs annually. He discussed recent legislation to reduce the minimum requirements for an instrument rating, ARSAs, and collision avoidance systems.

The AOPA has recently begun holding safety education seminars and plans to continue them for all Level 1 TCAs, funding permitting, also for all Level 2s. The keys to safety are better structuring, pilot education, and enforcement/violations.

Mr. Jack O'Brien, Aviation Safety Director of the 39,000 member Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), endorsed the creation of a new union for controllers. He stressed that a national organization is important for our interests and will provide a single voice on Capitol Hill, a single point of contact not only with the regulatory agencies, but with the press as well. Having worked with atc organizations in the past, he feels it necessary and extremely important that working controllers be on governmental advisory committees, such as that for air traffic procedures. This formerly had a PATCO representative as a member and also had DIRECT input to the FAA Administrator.

In August 1984, the ALPA made seventeen recommendations to the FAA Administrator. Among these was a request to specify that any transponder equipped aircraft be required to have them turned on while in flight, a proposal for Mode C intruder alert system and mandatory collision avoidance system installation in air carriers. Also, ALPA requested selective rehiring of some fired controllers as many facilities are understaffed and experience levels are limited. He commented that "the new people are dedicated and well trained, but sometimes put into situations they are not quite prepared for". Their far term suggestions include better windows in air carriers for higher visibility and the funding of the air traffic system modernization program at appropriate levels. He noted that the Aviation Trust Fund includes \$8 billion in surplus.

Mr. O'Brien detailed a safety survey distributed in June and July, of which 17,000 have been returned, ranking items of concern to ALPA pilots. The risk of a mid-air collision and the inability of the air traffic control system to adequately handle the demands placed upon it were the top two responses. They consider collision avoidance systems on air carriers to be of the utmost importance. The majority believe that safety has been negatively affected by deregulation. Other survey comments included observations on TCAs, ARSAs and delays. After a controller suggestion that pilots visit facilities during peak traffic periods, he explained that a program currently exists, but communications is only between ALPA representatives and facility managers. Once again, the need for organizing.

Mr. Thornton and the Regional Representatives will initially plan the workshops for legislation, contract negotiation and air safety, and volunteer members' names will be reported during a conference call on October 1, 1986.

A policy statement on the importance of air safety was issued. Included as part of the text was the concept that the NATCA National Executive Board would also be our National Safety Committee.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Thornton thanked our many guests and supporters and recounted the primary message we have repeatedly received from U.S. Congressmen, representatives of the ALPA and AOPA, other controller and technical organizations, and so many others-
ORGANIZE!

After brief comments by the Regional Representatives, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, MEBA - AFL/CIO Founding Convention was adjourned at 5:00 p.m., September 24, 1986.