

CHICAGO TEAMSTERS JOINT COUNCIL 25



NEWS»

TEAMSTERS OUT TO ORGANIZE MORE CONTINENTAL WORKERS **Union Ready to Organize More Than Half of Airline's Fleet Service Employees**

The Teamsters want to organize 8,000 fleet service workers at Continental Airlines in a bid to push the number of unionized workers at the nation's fourth-largest airline past the halfway mark.

The time is right to organize ramp, cargo and customer service workers at the Houston-based company, International Brotherhood of Teamsters President Jim Hoffa said recently.

Hoffa said the Teamsters filed for an election with the National Mediation Board on behalf of the workers. He said American companies have been sustaining profit growth at the expense of their own workers for decades and the result is the best union organizing climate in at least 10 years.

"There's a backlash taking place in this country because workers have gone backward," Hoffa said at a rally near Newark Liberty International Airport, home to Continental's second-largest hub. "People are outraged by excessive corporate profits and executive salaries and they're fighting back."

The percentage of the 129 million U.S. workers represented by labor unions rose to a three-year high of 13.7 percent in 2008 from 13.3 percent in 2007, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Teamsters, which have 1.4 million members, added 40,000 new members last year.

"We're definitely seeing more union activity in the airline and freight industries right now," said airline analyst Helane Becker, with Jesup & Lamont Securities. "They're testing the new administration to see if their election support will be rewarded."

Becker, who has a "buy" rating on Continental shares and owns none, said a similar union drive is under way to organize flight attendants at Delta Air Lines Inc.

The Teamsters estimate that 17,000 of Continental's 41,000 workers are unionized. The Teamsters presently represent 3,975 mechanics at the nation's fourth-largest airline and are seeking a new contract for them.

The union said a "strong majority" of Continental's fleet service workers are interested in becoming members. The election is the fifth attempt to organize fleet service workers at Continental in the last 13 years. Previous efforts never drew enough workers to be valid—more than half must cast ballots.

Hoffa also recently spoke at an organizing event in Farmingdale, N.Y., for 1,700 school bus drivers and later met with New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to discuss pollution from trucks in the Port of New York.