Washington unions put pressure on Wien Air bankers

The Seattle First National Bank, reported to have provided approximately $27 million in loans to Wien Air Alaska, has been told by the Washington State Labor Council AFL-CIO that it may lose union funds on deposit at the bank if it continues to assist Wien while its pilots remain on strike.

The AFL-CIO and its affiliates are variously estimated to have between $1.2 and $2 billion in union deposits, not counting individual accounts of members. A resolution adopted August 31 by the Washington labor convention indicated support for striking Wien pilots and the employees of Seattle-First, members of the Financial Institution Employees of America (FIEA).

The strongly-worded resolution said if the bank did not "alter its anti-union policy" the union affiliates "will discontinue the use of Seattle First National Bank for Union funds in any form."

Arguing for adoption of the resolution at the convention was Ray Rodgers, a representative of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union from New York City, who had become associated with the Wien pilot strike effort.

Rodgers told the convention, "The reason it (SeaFirst) can fight the interests of organized labor is that it has your money to do it with."

The resolution was adopted unanimously.

The Wien pilots have been on strike since May of 1977. Little or no progress has been reported in the dispute by either side. Wien has reportedly made a "final offer" to the pilot group, with that offer currently under consideration. In recent weeks and months, the strike has been the subject of statements by the Alaska Congressional Delegation and gubernatorial candidates, who have urged a solution to be sought. Native groups have also encouraged resumption of negotiations, citing safety concerns and replacement of Native pilots by outside, non-union pilots.

Last month, Wien board chairman Raymond Peterson announced he will step down as chief executive officer of the airline. The strike has now entered its seventeenth month.