

## **Disposable Worker**

Delta has tried to portray the Ready Reserve Program as a win-win for the company and the worker. It's just a convenience for some workers, they say. It's not a threat to anyone. An article in the January 18, 2010 edition of Business Week, not exactly a friend of the working class, shreds these ideas to pieces.

**“Peter Cappelli, Director of the Center for Human Resources at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, says the brutal recession has prompted more companies to create just-in-time labor forces that can be turned on and off like a spigot. ‘Employers are trying to get rid of all fixed costs,’ Cappelli says. ‘First they did it with employment benefits. Now they’re doing it with the jobs themselves. Everything else is variable.’ That means companies hold all the power and ‘all the risks are pushed on to employees.’”** (Business Week)

This is exactly what is happening at the new Delta. It is a future that has arrived with a vengeance. Delta has used the insourcing of stations such as SFO to dramatically lower labor costs by using a large percentage of Ready Reserve workers on the ramp. In that station there are 25 fulltime permanent ramp agents, 5 part time permanent ramp agents and 58 Ready Reserve workers. Over 66% of the workforce is temporary, with no health benefits, no accrual of seniority, no vacation time, no sick time, no OJI time, no pay progression.

For ticket agents in ANC the figures are similar: 12 permanent workers and 28 temporary. In SLC, a major hub for Delta, there are 227 Ready Reserves on the ramp. In addition, there are approximately 260 full time permanent and another 260 part time permanent, according to Delta baggage

handlers in that station. Hub workers are not immune. Downline stations are not immune. The ramp, stores, ticket counter and reservation centers are not immune.

The Business Week article also points to the role of unions in combating this process and to their role generally in setting wages and benefit levels.

**“But while unions covered 36% of private sector workers in 1953, the figure plunged to less than 8% by 2008. ‘Today, working conditions are set either by trends in the global economy or by non union firms in the U.S.,’ says Harley Shaiken, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley who specializes in labor issues. ‘Today that role is played by WalMart, with very different results’ says Shaiken.”** (Business Week)

This is what is meant by the WalMartization of the airline industry. A victory for Delta against the IAM will mean an even greater expansion of the use of disposable workers and the imposition of lower wages and slashed benefits for those who hang on to permanent employment. This is the inescapable message of the Business Week article.

On the other hand, a union victory with 30,000 IAM members at Delta will be the spring board for a rising industry standard. This future will include benefits for all Delta workers, including Ready Reserve. Our belief is that there should be no difference between any Delta workers except for the number of hours worked. That's a future worth fighting for.

To read the full text of the Business Week article go to [businessweek.com](http://businessweek.com) and type disposable worker into the search box.

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