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**PASS it on!**

The Effects of Civil Service Reform Legislation on the Organizing Story of one  
Federal Sector Union

**National Labor College**

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# PASS it on!

## **The Organizing Story of one Federal Sector Union in the New ERA of Civil Service Reform**

As every passenger or crew member straps themselves into a seat aboard any commercial or private aircraft destined to fly into the National Airspace of the United States they are literally giving over control of their personal safety to a vast network of interconnected technological systems. These allow for communications between the pilot and air traffic controllers, track the aircraft in flight with radar and satellite systems, and provide safe separation of all aircraft in point to point navigation before finally assuring controlled landings at the destination airport. The men and women represented by the Professional Aviation Systems Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS) are charged with installing, integrating, maintaining and certifying the safe and efficient operation of these technological systems.

In this paper I present an outline of the organizing story of PASS; how a nationwide bargaining unit was forged from an ineffectual consortium of disassociated Unions. The body presents the outline through a series of interviews combined with narrative notes and arranged under chapter headings. It is my hope that this will serve as the foundation for a book covering the early history of PASS. I started this project thinking I could do a presentable job of narrating PASS's history on these pages alone. However the story's complexity quickly evolved through the interviews to a point where the scope exceeded the project requirements. In consultation with my project advisor I decided to err on the side

of collecting as many interviews as possible, and assembling that information in a logical progression.

It turns out that for PASS the years of 1977 through 1981 are filled with drama and intrigue involving the most controversial public sector Union in our nation's history; Professional Air Traffic Controllers Association (PATCO). PASS's story reveals an exceptionally planned and executed series of raids on Unions large and small across the country. These activities eventually drew the attention, and the promised wrath of no less than George Meany, President AFL-CIO. The story covers the euphoria of the founding convention and the long battle afterward for certification. It documents how far thinking Union activists of the day from PATCO and The Maritime Engineers Beneficial Association, AFL-CIO (MEBA) provided crucial strategic guidance and the financial support necessary to bring PASS from an idea to reality. It is also the story of some of the first members and leaders of PASS. The risks they took and the sacrifices they made in their professional, financial, and ultimately their personal lives.

Every story requires a setting and PASS's stage opens in the mid 1970's when Bud Long, an activist and organizer from PATCO, noticed that technicians who worked closely with the air traffic controllers were not represented by a nationwide Union. He saw in this workforce the same set of conditions which allowed the successful organizing of PATCO in 1967, the first nationwide Union in the FAA. Around 1974 Long began a series of pitches to the PATCO board to help start a Union for the "Maintenance Guys".

It so happens that during this same time in history many of the rights private sector Unions enjoyed for over forty five years were finally being granted to federal workers. The right to Union representation in the Federal Aviation Administration originated in President John F. Kennedy's 1962 Executive Order 10988. The basic tenants were eventually codified into law through the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978.

Research showed something of a historical vacuum regarding labor organizing stories in the federal sector, and so my research turned to investigate the nature of the relationship between the government and its employees. My literature review documents changes in public attitude and subsequently law affecting federal worker organizing. In the end I uncovered a plausible explanation for the antipathy the public at large feels for the federal worker. However, the primary focus is to document the organizing story of PASS through interviews and personal accounts of founding members.

The timing of this work is critical. PASS has represented workers in the FAA for nearly thirty five years and the original generation of members has reached or surpassed retirement age. Few of the founding brothers and sisters who were personally involved in bringing this organization into existence remain employees of the FAA.

PASS has accumulated milestone summaries of its history, but these are not in narrative form and do not capture the stories and experiences of the founding members in a compelling way. By documenting our organizing story I hope to enlighten current and future members of PASS, the labor movement at large, and interested scholars regarding the conditions that existed before PASS won the right of exclusive representation and the circumstances and sacrifices made by the

founding members in their struggles to organize a workforce in a traditionally non Union environment. How PASS navigated the tumultuous period of the late 1970's and early 1980's when, just as they concluded their raiding campaign and prepared to celebrate nationwide certification, the Union that helped them get there was dismembered by President Ronald Reagan. PASS not only survived the succeeding years, but achieved a first contract in what was arguably the worst labor environment in the country, the post PATCO strike FAA. It is my hope that this work will provide an increased awareness of both the difficulties of organizing in the federal sector, and the opportunities presented to the labor movement at large by studying the successful models available.

The average citizen in this country generally holds the federal worker in unfavorable regard. As a modern employee this lack of appreciation for the exceptional services provided by so many was confounding. As the son of a United Steel Workers Union steward I was also at a loss to understand why the rights provided to the private sector employees through the 1935 National Labor Relations Act were withheld from the federal worker for so long. In the end the answer can be traced to the foundational document of our country, the United States Constitution.

This review explains the accidental politicization of the federal workforce and corruption that continued until a presidential assassination brought long overdue change. From there I explore the decades long three way tug of war between the branches of government over the control of the federal workforce. Then we arrive at the more enlightened days of and after President John F. Kennedy and the executive order that finally delivered the right to collective representation. Finally we come to the 1978 passage of the Civil Service Reform Act, which the leaders of PASS had a hand in shaping.

## **Literature Review of Labor Policy in the Federal Sector:**

*“Incorporating public employees into labor history shows that a good deal of the conventional wisdom and academic theory about Unions in the United States is either misleadingly incomplete or simply wrong.... As a result, revealing comparisons have been missed, and the pictures of “labor” and “workers” are incomplete to the point of inaccuracy.”*  
Slater, J. H. (2004)

The main body of this paper explores the organizing story of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (AFL-CIO) covering a period from 1977 to 1981. I reviewed many relevant internal PASS documents to establish a context for the interview data. These included minutes from the formative meeting in Chicago, the earliest convention documents, and the available internal publications of PASS from 1977 to 1981. I have attached some of these as appendices three, four and nineteen. Although this reading was helpful in understanding the key players of the time and some of the earliest hurdles to organizing, there was little information that answered two fundamental questions:

Why were the members of PASS, along with the majority of federal employees, denied the rights to exclusive representation granted private sector Unions under 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)? Why did it take forty-three additional years to pass similar legislation covering the federal worker?

My research uncovered a complicated answer fraught with intrigue and avarice.

## Pre 1935: The Prostitution of Power

Among other privileges bestowed on the President of the United States in the Constitution are the powers as chief executive including the ability to hire and fire employees of the federal government. These are enumerated in Article Three:

*“He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by Law: but the Congress may by Law vest the Appointment of such inferior Officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the Courts of Law, or in the Heads of Departments.”* Jefferson, T. 1776 United States Constitution

The key phrase for this discussion is “in the President alone.” As it turned out, having the sole ability to determine who should work for the entire federal government would lead to an infection of patronage and turned post-filling into a cash cow for the party in power.

Our earliest presidents tried to fill the ranks with individuals who possessed some semblance of the technical requirements of their posting. Unfortunately, successive administrations were prone to replacing those appointed by their predecessors with their own choices.

Nicole Mitchell of the University of Alabama at Birmingham describes the reality that was the federal service of this era:

*“Until the end of the Civil War, friends, family members, and financial supporters could virtually count on obtaining a job with the civil service. During elections, office seekers continually sought jobs,*

*contributing money to political campaigns and even going so far as to place advertisements in the newspapers. As each new administration took office, however, it appointed new people to posts, so there was no long term job security. People feared losing their jobs as soon as new administrators were elected or their political patrons lost power.”*

Predictable results of this arrangement, which became known as the spoils system, were the decline in productivity of the federal government and the tarnished image of public employment. Despite the shortcomings of this system an absence of political will maintained the status quo until the 1880 when President James Garfield was shot and eventually died at the hands of Charles Guiteau, a disgruntled would be federal employee . This was the last straw for informed citizens who had witnessed successive administrations become increasingly unabashed in rewarding their supporters directly from the public coffers.

On the tide of reform sentiment several like-minded legislators led by Senator George H. Pendleton of Ohio drafted a civil service reform bill intending to replace the spoils system with one based on the merits of the candidates for federal positions. Even with intense public pressure for action the political posturing continued:

“The basic issue involved was that the Republicans had been in office for 20 years but the Democrats anticipated victory in the Presidential elections in 1884. The Democrats, of course, hoped to do some vigorous “redressing of the balance.”

OPM (2003)



## Rhetoric v Reality: What Act? I Don't See Any Act!

The unflagging efforts of constituency groups succeeded in passing the legislation commonly known as the Pendleton Civil Service Act of 1883. There was to be a civil service system based on merit that would remain fundamentally unaltered for almost a hundred years. The following are key phrases from the act intended to separate once and for all the unholy payment of federal dollars through employment in exchange for political or financial support:

- no person in the public service is under any obligations to contribute to any political fund, or to render any political service, and will not be removed or otherwise prejudiced for refusing to do so.
- no person has any right to use his official authority or influence to coerce the political action of any person or body.
- no person shall solicit or receive any contribution of money or any other thing of value for any political purpose whatever.

To oversee the implementation and enforcement of this system, the act created a three person “Civil Service Commission” and reformers returned home legislatively sated.

Unfortunately, the commission was underfunded and the law applied to only ten percent of the federal workforce at the time it was passed. The remaining majority of positions were “excepted” from the law.

During the years immediately following the passage of the act, the only significant expansions of employees covered were enacted in the lame duck sessions of outgoing administrations. These actions would lock the favored employees into career positions protected from the whim of future administrations.

President Theodore Roosevelt proved the next serious reformer of the federal service. Having served on the Civil Service Commission he brought an in-depth understanding of the issues. Unfortunately he vigorously opposed employee rights and further limited them through Presidential edicts.

*“In executive orders in 1902 and 1904, he forbade employees, on pain of dismissal, either as individuals or as members of organizations, to seek any pay increases or to attempt to influence legislation before Congress, except through the heads of their departments.”* OPM (2003)

President Taft echoed Roosevelt with another series of gag orders. After a political backlash, Congress eventually moved to curtail the presidential actions passing the Llyod-LaFollete Act of 1912. This lifted the gag rules and allowed employees to join Unions that did not claim the right to strike. Llyod-LaFollete fanned flames of Unionism in the federal sector. When congress sought to lengthen the federal work day in 1916 grass roots organizing defeated the attempt and resulted in the formation in 1917 of the National Federation of Federal Employees, which soon affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The following year the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) followed suit.

Despite these gains federal employees suffered a series of setbacks during the great depression. The Economy Act of 1932 imposed payless furloughs of one month a year for federal employees and removed employee spouses through reductions in force (RIF). This included the spouses of federal pensioners or enlisted members of the Armed Forces. So as the public sector worker woke to a new day of privileges in 1935 the wait for the federal worker continued.

### 1935 to 1962: The Taint Lingers

Time marched on and more of the federal service transitioned to the merit system and the Civil Service Commission was better provisioned for its work resulting in a positive effect on the productivity of the government. However job security continued as a central concern.

Rules of the merit system were relaxed during World War II as the ranks of federal employees skyrocketed to accommodate the war effort then crashed with post emergency RIFs. The cycle repeated during the Korean War. Throughout this process the executive and legislative branch continued to battle over which employees were covered by merit based systems and which were left as spoils.

With the notable exception of the Postal Service, federal employees were not widely organized and those who were continued to be denied full collective bargaining rights. Aggrieved employees found internal processes ineffective and the courts supported heavy-handed management, thereby establishing a legal premise that employees of the federal service enjoyed only limited constitutional rights.

During the presidential election cycle of 1960 pressure for the rights of federal employees was again on the rise and candidate, John F. Kennedy committed his support. On the eve of momentous changes for federal workers in 1961, W. Hart published: *Collective Bargaining in the Federal Service – A study of Labor Management Relations in the United States Government* This book contained a comprehensive review of the arguments for and against Unionism in the federal sector. I have attached the full text of these positions in Appendix One but will summarize them here:

Against Employee Representation:

- The “sovereign” concept that the government as employer can’t be negotiated with
- Pay is set by the Congress so the executive couldn’t negotiate even if it chose to
- Congress’ exclusion of federal employees from the NLRA was intentional and binding

#### In Favor of Employee Representation:

- Federal labor-management practice was outdated
- Since private employers are compelled by law to recognize employee representation, the federal government should be also.
- The system would be improved with employee input

#### 1962 to 1977 from Promise to Law

Although several administrations flirted with additional reform in the decades following Llyod-LaFollete the necessary political will to reform was not marshaled into law. To circumvent this shortcoming President Kennedy issued Executive Order (EO) 10988 in 1962 which provided a fundamental change of direction for organizations representing federal employees. In the decades that followed the number of employee organizations with exclusive representational rights rose dramatically.

*“The order affirmed the value of employee participation in the development of personnel policies and declared that employees have the right to join labor organizations and the right not to join or participate (no closed shops in the Government). The order also required management to negotiate with Unions, prohibited strikes or*

*picketing, and provided standards of conduct for Unions and fair labor practices for agencies.” OPM (2003)*

The actual language of the executive order artfully placed federal labor management practices on a similar, if not identical, setting as found in the private sector while retaining significant rights for federal agencies. The full order is attached as Appendix Three but will highlight important sections here.

First a summary of the opening statements:

- *participation of employees in the formulation and implementation of personnel policies affecting them contributes to effective conduct of public business*
- *the efficient administration of the Government and the well-being of employees require that orderly and constructive relationships be maintained between employee organizations and management officials*
- *employee-management relations should be improved by greater (employee) participation in the formulation and implementation of policies and procedures affecting the conditions of their employment*

The following excerpts from the order (italicized), followed by commentary highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of the new order:

*“When an employee organization has been formally recognized, the agency, through appropriate officials, shall consult with such organization from time to time in the formulation and implementation of personnel policies and practices, and matters affecting working conditions that are of concern to its members”.*

If I ask your opinion on my decision, I have consulted. If I involve you in the formulation of my decision I have negotiated. This section triggered several

decades of questions concerning the rights of consultation vs. pre-decisional involvement.

*“When an employee organization has been recognized as the exclusive representative of employees of an appropriate unit it shall be entitled to act for and to negotiate agreements covering all employees in the unit and shall be responsible for representing the interests of all such employees without discrimination and without regard to employee organization membership. Such employee organization shall be given the opportunity to be represented at discussions between management and employees or employee representatives concerning grievances, personnel policies and practices, or other matters affecting general working conditions of employees in the unit.”*

This section establishes the rights to exclusive representation and recognized Unions as the voice of and negotiators for federal employees. There could now be negotiated grievance procedures and binding collective bargaining agreements. Kennedy’s act not only expanded the number of people eligible for Union representation, but unmistakably thrust the Unions squarely into relevance to their newly acquired bargaining units.

Kennedy’s executive order, strengthened under President Nixon, became the foundation for the law enacted in 1978. The era of 1962 to 1977 reflects moderation in the federal posture regarding Union activity, but only in so far as Presidential order allowed or was enforced. However expansion of access to representation resulted in a tremendous growth of Unionism in the public sector that continues to this day.

## The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978

The 1978 Civil Service Reform Act, known as the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Act, finally brought the rights to public employees granted to private sector workers in 1935.

The Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (AFL-CIO) came into being under this new environment and it can be argued that the success of PASS as an organization would not have been possible prior to passage of the Statute.

It is remarkable to me that the history of federal sector labor has been largely ignored, and that of the same injustices that ignited the private sector labor movement smoldered for so long in the federal sector. In the end, an unveiling of the corrupt nature of the early federal service and the lingering temptation to revert to the system of spoils helps lend credence to the public sentiment against the federal worker. As a modern employee of the federal government, I feel punished for the sins of my fathers.

## **Methodology**

This paper documents the labor-management experience of the federal sector worker and particularly focuses on the early organizing efforts of the labor organizations that would become PASS.

I conducted a historical review of literature on the development of labor law in the public sector, with a particular emphasis on the denial of the right to representation for the federal workforce. I examined the effects of Kennedy's Executive Order 10988 and Nixon's Executive Order 11491, both of which expanded the rights of federal workers and, to varying degrees, forced federal managers to recognize their bargaining units' representatives, and "consult" with them if not actually being required to engage in full collective bargaining.

I examined the work place conditions within the FAA in the latter half of the 1970's including a review of the bargaining unit(s) previously represented by National Association of Government Employees/Federal Aviation Science and Technological Association (NAGE/FASTA) in order to establish the conditions which allowed for PASS to petition the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) for the right of exclusive representation of the (then) FAA's Airway Facilities employee bargaining unit. Most importantly, I conducted a series of interviews with seventeen of the original organizers and founding members of PASS per the interview protocol in Appendix Three. From these interviews, I extracted their personal stories and created a chapter outline for a future book on the history of PASS.

### Protocol for conducting the interview



I asked each interviewee if I could record the interview.

I followed a predetermined and approved set of interview questions to insure consistency.

I avoided sharing information about completed interviews to avoid biasing the responses.

At the conclusion of the interview I thanked the interviewee and asked if they were interested in seeing the final paper.

My analysis focused on the connection between the opportunities for organizing the employees into what would become PASS and the change in the public laws. It was interesting to discover that, although the organizing effort could not have met with the same success prior to the change in the law, the founding members of PASS gave it little notice. It was only after PASS achieved nationwide certification that the leadership turned to the new law to help curb the bloodlust of the FAA that had just successfully overseen the dismantling of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO).

*Research on the history of PASS is presented as a booklet for the PASS membership.*

# **Shaking the House of Labor – The Conception and Birth of a New Federal Union**

## **Introduction**

The membership of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (AFL/CIO) of today is a diverse group of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Department of Defense (DOD) employees with responsibilities ranging from inspection of aircraft and air crews to the installation, integration, maintenance, troubleshooting, repair and certification of a vast and complex network of equipment and facilities used in monitoring and controlling the National Airspace System (NAS), and many of the support and administrative positions required to accomplish this work. This paper explores the formative years of PASS from concept and initial discussions in 1972 through certification by the FLRA in 1981 using the recollections of those who were there as the framework for the story. To that end, I completed seventeen interviews with founding fathers, early organizers and early members who were directly involved in the thick of the organizing effort around the country.

In addition I reviewed dozens of contemporary PASS publications and communications which allowed me to confirm, and more clearly sequence, the formative events.

The story of PASS begins some ten years after the landmark Executive Order 10988 issued by President John F. Kennedy. This Order conferred on the federal employee many of the rights granted to their private sector counterparts in 1935 with the passage of the National Labor Relations Act. As with any long standing organization PASS has evolved considerably since the Union was created to exclusively represent electronic and electro-mechanical technicians in the FAA. The work these technicians performed allowed for communications between the pilot and air traffic controllers; the ability to track aircraft in flight with radar, and provided safe separation of all aircraft in the United States airspace.

Originally the acronym PASS's stood for; "The Professional Airways Systems Specialists". That the name is a technically accurate description of the work done by the initial members reflects both on their pride in their craft, and the precise, if sometimes cryptic, nature of the characters involved. PASS's original members reflected a workforce of approximately 12,000 technicians scattered across the country from remote mountain top sites to large urban airports and regional control centers.

## **Chapter one: Prior to PASS –Working Conditions**

In the years leading up to 1977 FAA management was widely viewed by its workforce as militant, top down, inequitable and disrespectful. Many managers were seen as shirt and tie task masters who wielded almost unlimited power in the workplace, and had little personal regard for the well being of the employee. On the job description of the technician prior to PASS there was a tasks category called “Other duties as assigned”. Whatever the original intention of the language, the reality for the technicians was that in addition to the standard workload of employees were required to do essentially whatever the supervisor chose to assign. It was common place for a technician to be called on to mop and wax floors, paint walls, and mow grass or shovel sidewalks. They were also expected to accomplish all these tasks with no impact on the schedule of routine or corrective technical work for which they were hired. Employees were told:

“We can tell you what to do, when to do it and how to do it. You want a job? You do it.” Medeiros 1/11

The FAA, like much of the federal government at the time, considered itself above the laws enforced on employers in the private sector. In troublesome areas of such as laws requiring safe working conditions, they summarily declared; “Sovereign Immunity!” This legal construct holds that “The king can do no wrong!” and therefore could not be held to account by the serf. The FAA of the day used this precept to let protests of unsafe conditions go unanswered. Technicians were, in the course of their work, required to climb high towers with grossly inadequate fall protections systems where any existed at all. They worked in confined space with rodent, wasp, or snake hazards. They often worked alone in environmental extremes from tropical to desert; mountaintop to arctic and in some parts of the

county could experience those extremes on the same day. They worked amidst carcinogens from asbestos to PCB's to electromagnetic radiation; and everywhere these technicians performed their job they could be found elbow deep in live electrically powered equipment. And yet:

“If you mentioned safety you were kind of like a communist. They had no safety program at all.” James 1/11

The salt in these wounds could be found in the agency's failure to provide fair compensation, another area of established law routinely ignored. Employees who had achieved all the requirements for promotion could be assigned the workload, but denied the pay for years as the agency artificially held them at the lower grade. When required to perform overtime technicians could be paid what some technicians called “funny money” because it was less than their standard hourly rate.

Employees who objected were given short shrift. The FAA's grievance process of the day provided only that the employee could formally complain to the offending supervisor who most often summarily dismissed the grievance. Elevation of the issue went only so far as the Sector Manager and in almost every case the complaint was denied and dismissed. It was common for an employee who complained to suffer after the fact. These employees could expect to be assigned the worst shifts or the most menial and degrading tasks. They could expect their days off to be changed with little or no notice, approved vacations cancelled and short notice assignments to long term training far away from home. In the worst examples workers found themselves unilaterally reassigned to a distant work center and advised that this was where their job was, if they wanted to keep it.

In addition to unfair treatment by their supervisory chain the technician who worked in facilities where air traffic controllers performed their jobs could often expect to have the value of their contribution demeaned by those who depended on it most. Air Traffic controllers of the day routinely referred to technicians as “maintenance guys” or, owing to the fact that many technician’s workplaces were in the windowless basements of the facilities; “cellar rats”.

Air transportation in America had become the norm and through the hard work of PATCO, the air traffic controllers had successfully educated the public on the complexity and stress inherent to that work. Technicians worked in the same high stress environment that is the National Airspace System. The equipment they were required to keep running ranged from the grossly obsolete to the cutting edge of technology. They were required to have years of training and experience just to enter the FAA and could expect to spend several more years during their careers away from home being retrained on new systems. They would be asked to integrate newer technologies into the existing system without disabling it. Technicians compare this work to changing a transmission on a car; while it’s being driven. Technicians also require extensive on the job training to attain the ability to legally certify the readiness of their assigned equipment. They did so knowing that, should tragedy occur in the sky, they may be called to attest in court on every action and adjustment they made. Yet they worked alongside controllers whose jobs required no advance training, yet were significantly better paid, enjoyed better working conditions, and had demanded and received the respect of the public, and the employer.

## Chapter Two: Prior to PASS - Representation

The relationship between the employee and FAA management notwithstanding there were Unions in the federal sector prior to the Kennedy's 1962 EO. However, the growth in both the number of Unions and their membership exploded with its implementation. Post order agencies across the government, including the FAA, were now required to accept a higher level of representation for a significantly broader section of the workforce. This was not welcome news to managers who believed in a "rule and control" approach to labor relations. Managers in the FAA soon discovered a means to comply with the law, while avoiding its intent.

At first glance Kennedy's Order proclaims the need for employee representation in the federal sector (underscore added for emphasis):

WHEREAS participation of employees in the formulation and implementation of personnel policies affecting them contributes to effective conduct of public business; and

WHEREAS the efficient administration of the Government and the well-being of employees require that orderly and constructive relationships be maintained between employee organizations and management officials; and

WHEREAS subject to law and the paramount requirements of the public service, employee-management relations within the Federal service should be improved by providing employees an opportunity for greater participation in the formulation and implementation of policies and procedures affecting the conditions of their employment;

While this may seem like clear language the devil is as they say in the details. The Order went on to outline how representative groups obtain formal or informal

recognition which is to say whether they can bargain on behalf of employees with the agency. The key provisions, which may have enabled what from a distance appears to be malicious compliance, gave the authority to determine appropriate unit structures to “the agency”. (See Appendix Two) When the FAA determined the boundaries of their bargaining units, the result was a fractionalized, and arguably less effective, patchwork quilt of organizations “exclusively” representing technicians. Some “units” were limited to a single facility, as was the case with the Los Angeles Air Route Traffic Control Center, which was awarded to the National Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians (NBET). Similarly Chicago’s O’Hare Airport technicians were represented by the International Association of Teamsters (IAT). The agency granted the largest piece of the pie to The National Association of Government Employees / Federal Aviation Science and Technological Association (NAGE/FASTA) and The American Federation of Government Employees AFL-CIO (AFGE). All together there were thirteen separate bargaining units covering employees who did the same work, in nearly identical facilities across the country. This arrangement might have passed without issue if the members of the different bargaining units did not interact. But these employees were in the business of maintaining one of the largest communications networks in the country. To receive training necessary to accomplish their mission FAA technical employees were sent to long term schooling at the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center’s FAA Academy in Oklahoma City. Over the course of a career employees could expect to spend years at this home away from home, in the company of other technicians from around the country. For the technical workforce, like a large family, geographic dispersion did not preclude knowing everybody else’s business. So troubles were shared, representation compared, and discontent fomented.



With the example of PATCO's success in organizing a nationwide unit it seems intuitive both that the technicians would want to reproduce that success for themselves and the Unions representing the technicians would take notice and move to improve their perceived utility in the eye of their membership or risk the same fate as the Unions that preceded PATCO. Yet I found little in the record to show these Unions engaged in much counter-organizing beyond a few public letter exchanges. Of all the members I spoke with, only one commented positively on the predecessor Union. A group of technicians in Oklahoma were represented by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) which enjoyed almost 100 % membership. Members appeared satisfied with their representation. Yet this group would eventually produce some of the hardest working organizers in the mid-west region for PASS. It turns out that these members recognized the bargaining advantage of having a single a nationwide unit.

With the exception of the IAM even the most gracious among those interviewed maintained strongly negative feelings for the Unions responsible to represent their interests prior to emergence of PASS. That most of the criticism went to the largest Union, NAGE/FASTA, makes mathematical sense. However the employees represented by NAGE/FASTA were clearly still upset by the perceived lack of redress for what are now decades old concerns. Employees complained that they had worked in facilities represented by NAGE/FASTA for years before they even learned they had a Union. Some came to the FAA with prior Union experience and joined NAGE/FASTA and were often given representative positions, but they found themselves on their own. Even where a regional representative tried to lend support to the local, the issue would die on the vine when it went further up the chain. The legacy of NAGE/FASTA in the FAA might serve today as a study in 'not to do' for successful organizing against a raid. These experiences are most aptly summed up in the words those who were there:

“You paid your dues, you heard nothing, and you didn’t see people.  
Contact went into a Black Hole.” Schneider 1/11

“Whatever concerns we had as technicians were lost in the shuffle.”  
Deluca 1/11

These people saw no utility or effectiveness in; and no connection to their Union.

Although the members of some of the other Unions were not as disaffected, here too there was a sense of that these organizations were outsiders who either did not understand the nature of the federal workplace, or were simply harvesting dues and providing ‘lip service’ to representation.

### **Chapter Three: Initial Discussions and a Leg Up**

The retrospective histories of PASS point to the initial convention of February 1977 as the “Birth” of the Union and I address the activities and impressions of that meeting in the next chapter of this paper. However, prior to birth there must be conception and I was interested in establishing (if possible) who among the founding fathers was responsible for the initial idea of forming PASS.

As it turns out the kernel of that idea did not come from within the ranks of the early PASS membership. Instead, Marvin “Bud” Long, a forward thinking activist from the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization–AFL-CIO (PATCO) was the first to take action in organizing the technicians. Long had been with PATCO during the struggle for that organizations national recognition and understood the advantages in having another nationwide Union to in their dealings with the agency. What follows is an excerpt from John Seddon’s Master’s Thesis on PATCO which illustrates the common PASS/PATCO experience of a fractionalized workforce:

“From its inception, PATCO was developed for the specific purpose of maintaining a national cohesive organization that would represent the federal Government’s air traffic controllers.

Prior to 1967, the nation's air traffic controller had been represented by a host of splintered organizations including local independents, the Air Traffic Controller

Association (ATCA), a supervisor dominated company Union, and an all purpose organization called the National Association of Government Employees (NAGE).” Seddon, J (1990) PATCO - A PERSPECTIVE - WHO WERE THEY? What Were They, and What Could Have or Should Have Been Done? A THESIS

Long saw the technicians being subjected to the same “divide and conquer” tactics that his own organization had defeated. .. Knowing too well that any attempt to organize the technicians would require resources Long pitched his idea to the PATCO executive board.

“The whole idea was; you can never get anywhere with disparate Unions not cooperating within the FAA. So from the get go PATCO and PASS knew that they were going to cooperate. We could leapfrog them in the contracts. What we (PATCO) got PASS could go in there and say, hey you gave it to them; we want it and go for a little more. Then we walk in and say ‘hey wait a minute, you can’t treat them better’ ... so it was just the smart thing to do.” Long 3/11

At the time PATCO had not yet been in existence for five years. The board rejected Long's proposal, not on the merits, but on the reality that they had too much in house business requiring their attention to afford the distraction of another nationwide organizing drive.

Bud continued to press the PATCO board for the next five years. During that time he relocated to the New York Common Instrument Flight Rule (NYIFR) facility, where he met Johannssen, a radar technician in the facility who had his share of frustrations with the representation the technicians received from NAGE/FASTA.

“I wrote a letter to Stanley Lyman who was President and told him that I thought the Union was weak and needed support. He never responded to that at all. Later I ran into him at a meeting and reminded him of that letter. I told the President that; no one (from NAGE) does anything, says anything or gets back to anyone! He told me ‘Yeah I remember that letter! You’re trying to make waves! We don’t want to make waves around here. If you don’t like this Union – go form your own!’ And I said OK. So I went back the next day and got everyone to stop paying their dues and got out of the Union.” Johannssen 1/11

Johannssen and Long soon had their heads together about the possibility of organizing the technicians.

With time PATCO stabilized its member base and support began to grow for the idea of a separate Union for the technicians. Bud Long's persistence finally paid off when the PATCO executive board agreed to approach Jesse Calhoun, President of District one Maritime Engineers Benevolent Association (MEBA).

“And he bought into it and gave PATCO the organizing money to start an autonomous Union.” Long 3/11

Mike Rock, PATCO co- founder and current director of labor relations was given charge of the project. He sent Long back to Johannssen with the word that PATCO/MEBA were in for the seed money, but they would need a show of interest among the technicians before committing more resources. Johannssen finally saw the opportunity to make good on his promise to Lyman to “Start his own Union” and rose to the challenge with a vengeance and soon had enough showing of interest to convince PATCO that it was the right time to take the next steps.

## **Chapter Four: 1976 to 1977 To First Convention**

### **Show of Interest**

“Prior to PASS we had cards for folks to sign for \$10 as a show of interest for a future organization, we didn’t have a name yet. The very first day, the very first ten dollars we collected, that was me.”

Johannssen 2/11

PATCO and MEBA leadership knew well the tasks at hand. First they had to organize enough interested members from around the country to hold a legitimate convention. They could then produce the documents outlined in President Nixon’s executive order 11491 which amended Kennedy’s initial order 10988:

b) A labor organization seeking recognition shall submit to the agency a roster of its officers and representatives, a copy of its constitution and by-laws, and a statement of its objectives.

It was time to begin the organizing effort in earnest. Long was appointed the lead organizer from PATCO. He and Johannssen hit the road to make the best of the opportunity.

Bud visited every PATCO local in the country and connected with the technicians at the FAA facilities letting them know about the plan for a nationwide Union and trying to recruit technicians to attend the convention.

There is no doubt that Johannssen believed to his core that a new Union was needed, and with the logistical and financial support that was now in play, creating

one seemed possible. There was also no doubt in Johannssen's mind as to who should lead the new Union:

“I took a lot of trips. I knew I wanted to run for President and I didn't want to have anyone think I was doing this for moneys so I did it all out of my own pocket. I wanted to be one of the guys out there in front.”

Johannssen 1/11

A small group of organizers crisscrossed the country visiting as many facilities as they could and called where they couldn't go. They made their case to anyone who would listen. They quickly discovered that technicians across the country were ready for change, and willing to help. Many of those first contacts became early organizers themselves. Several would surface as members of future PASS executive board.

Soon the meetings with folks in the field and the buzz on the informal FAA technician's communications networks confirmed that there was sufficient interest in assembling a convention. MEBA gave the green light and arranged to host the convention in Chicago. MEBA promised to reimburse travel and lodging expenses for one technician from each FAA facility to attend.

### **Johannssen's Letter:**

In the last half of January 1977 technicians around the country opened their mail and found a mimeographed cartoon depicting a man being assaulted by a time clock with the caption: “What's happening to Our Jobs? Do You Care? I DO! A New Organization is the Answer!” Entire letter is attached as APPX. What followed were eight pages of typewritten prose, opening with an introduction to



Johannssen, FAA technician and recent labor studies graduate. This was followed by a dramatically articulated list of grievances against both the agency and the current Unions blended with praise for PATCO's organizing skill and their successes against the agency. In addition to repeating these core messages Johannssen extolled on subjects ranging from the need for the technicians to be represented from within; to the need to improve the professional image of the technician workforce; pointedly starting with their self image:

“Many of us still consider ourselves ‘Maintenance Men’ WOW... Respect starts with showing some respect for ourselves and our fellow workers.” Johannssen 1/15/77

One sentence from the letter clearly demonstrates the dramatic rhetorical style that everyone who met Johannssen clearly recalls:

“The need for this new organization is clear, the manpower and expertise within our ranks, the desire is ever present, the injustices within the FAA continue to grow unchecked ...” Johannssen 1/15/77

Johannssen closes the letter with an invitation to the opening of the organizing convention in Chicago Illinois on February 14th.

The combined efforts of all those involved in this earliest organizing effort soon paid off when the first 100 members signing \$10 cards show of interest cards were signed and 50 interested technicians from around the country converged on the O'Hare International Airport Ramada Inn.

## Chapter Five: The 1977 Convention

Only a few of those interviewed actually attended the convention but most heard about it directly from someone who attended. By all accounts there was a whirlwind of activity in the official meetings and the after-hours congregations. Johannssen unabashedly began his campaign for the presidency the first night.

“I rented a suite and had a bar set up and invited everybody up to my room. I wanted to be the big city guy and wanted them to know I had graduated with a degree in Labor. I wanted to show them I wanted the job and I could do it.” Johannssen 2/11

Johannssen was quickly reminded of the idiosyncrasies of the group he was trying to organize. Being a technician and having worked with them around the country allows me to attest that they can be fiercely logical, frustratingly particular, and maddeningly certain of their conclusions. FAA technicians were also skeptical of leadership and cynical about motivations. Johannssen’s difficulties with his first attempts to impress are less than surprising.

“So then Jesse Calhoun (President MEBA D1) comes in and everyone comes in to see him; except Larry Sump! He says ‘I’m not coming in there! You’re not going to buy me! If you want to talk to me you can come out here!’” Johannssen 2/11

Johannssen did just that. Larry Sump was elected as a regional vice president that week and soon became one of the most active PASS organizers in the country.

The convention was opened the next morning with by William Peer, PATCO counsel. He told the attendees about the technical hurdles they would have to

overcome to be a legitimate Union in the eyes of the DOL and therefore be recognized by the FAA. Energized and determined the technicians passed a “Resolution on Founding the Organization” in the first few hours.

President John Leyden of PATCO spoke and pledged aid and support to the group and clarified the funding for the record:

“PATCO is a vehicle for MEBA’s funds. The PATCO people are here on PATCO funds... We will assist at all levels.” (Leyden 1977) From PASS founding convention minutes.

Yet he also took great care to let the group know that despite this financial assistance the wheels of the organization were in the membership’s hands. In the question and answer session he outlined a plan of attack to challenge the other Unions that would become the basis of PASS’s organizing strategy.

Next to speak was the President of MEBA District 1 - Jessie Calhoun who prepared them for the fight ahead:

“He told the assembly that they gave away their rights and they must take them back. This cannot be done on a friendly basis.” PASS founding convention Minutes 1977 (Summary of Jessie Calhoun’s Speech)

In Mike Rock’s address he advised that to legitimize their Union the technicians would need to create a constitution. PATCO had come with a boiler-plate and suggested regional divisions; however the technicians attending would have to make it their own. At this point the technicians began to assume the ownership of the organization they were creating. For most it was their first introduction to the process of group governance . Reading the minutes brings to mind the image of the

moderator herding cats. The technicians were wary as they proceeded slowly through the process, tripping over the unfamiliar rules of parliamentary procedure and learning on the fly. Given the technicians' history with other Unions it is no surprise that debates took place concerning the balance of powers between the executives and the membership; between trusting the elected officers and providing safeguards to protect the interests of the membership as a whole.

Interestingly the longest debates of the convention involved naming the organization. That discussion ranged over three days and two evenings as the group narrowed their choices, trying to find a brand the membership could identify with, and be inspired by.

Bud Long pushed the group toward a name that would reflect the professionalism of their work to both the internal membership and the FAA. Eventually a multiple elimination voting scheme established that they would be called the Professional Airways Systems Specialists – PASS.

In addition to the constitution and the naming of the organization the convention was called on to elect the first slate of officers. These first officers would be considered temporary, holding their offices only until the first annual convention of the elected delegates could be scheduled.

Johannssen's candidacy was well known and he had come to the convention with a solid network of supporters. In the end his only contender withdrew before the vote, Johannssen won his bid to become the first PASS President. However the technicians rejected Johannssen's named choice for Vice President, Lloyd Waldrep, and elected Chuck Cage from Oakland instead.

Some of the new officers were surprised to find themselves elected.

“All I went up there to do was observe, listen and get ready to report back to the other folks at CHG center.” Schneider 1/11

Mark Schneider was elected as the Vice President for the Central Region. Within a year he would leave the FAA to become the first permanent Executive Vice President.

And so with the technical stage set, the main cast assembled and the objectives clear the organization of PASS emerged from Chicago.

The first Executive Board of the Professional Airways Systems Specialists:

National President- Johannssen

National Vice President- Charles Cage

Eastern Region Vice President – Harry Chall

Central Region Vice President – Mark Schneider

Western Region Vice President- Lawrence Sump

Midwest Region Vice President- John Tucker

## Chapter Six: The Drive to Organize

Those three full days of hard work at the founding convention turned out in many ways to be the easiest hurdles the young organization had to overcome. The newly minted officers would now have to return to their FAA jobs and begin the organizing effort while simultaneously engaging the tedious process of applying for recognition in each of the existing bargaining units. Recognizing that they were operating on limited and borrowed funding the Executive Board decided that only the national President would begin as a full time paid position. This meant Johannssen would have to request leave from his position to accomplish the work. It was no surprise when the Agency refused to grant his request:

“They said ‘Absolutely no way. If you want to start a Union then you’re going to have to quit! Make your bed and sleep in it.’ So I said, ‘OK thank you. I quit!’ and that was that.” Johannssen 2/11

Despite the bravado of this statement Johannssen took stock of the personal risks associated with this life altering decision. As a single parent abandoning the security of a federal position on the chance that this new organization would survive was not an easy decision. To quit his position with no assurance that he would even retain his office at the next election significantly upped the ante.

Johannssen dove into his responsibilities quickly and PASS published its first newsletter less than a month after the closing gavel of the founding convention. The quality of the newsletter, the organizers who helped produce it and the rapid dispersion demonstrated that PATCO and MEBA were coming through on their promises of support. The document was a skillful blend of introduction, education,

and rallying cry. The language left no doubt that this was a Union that directly identified with its membership and would fight on their behalf. It was also made clear that Johannssen who would be leading the charge.

Although the glossy print portrayed the successes in Chicago and touted the new Professional image of the Airway Facilities technician, the fact was that the organization existed only in the most skeletal of senses. As the lawyers from PATCO and MEBA filed appropriate petitions Johannssen found himself at the head of a brand new organization. As the only elected official of PASS in Washington his immediate tasks were monumental. PASS had stepped onto the public stage. In order to stay there PASS would need to assert its authority with an agency loathe to entertain another nationwide Union build on the model of PATCO. PASS would need to plan and execute the initial raids on Unions large and small all while conducting advance organizing at locations across the country anticipating the next series of raids.

If PASS was to survive this infancy the new executive board would also have to hit the ground running. The record and the recollections confirm that they did just that. Within two months, before the first meeting of the executive board, the initial cadre of officers and organizers recruited over six hundred new members. No mean feat for an organization that officially represented no one.

In April the board members met for the first time in Washington. Since PASS had no representational status the board members had to use their vacation time, or annual leave, to attend. They wasted no time and in two short days:

Establish by-laws for and chartered the first PASS local in Chicago.

Created an organizing structure and plan.

Approve hiring the first staff (one attorney, one book-keeper).

Set in motion the first challenge on behalf of the technicians with the Civil Service Commission's over the denial of fair overtime wage rates.

Having finished this business all hands went back to their facilities and continued organizing. Within a week of the executive board meeting PASS actions would be drawing attention in federal circles:

“Union watchers say that the PASS effort to raid NAGE's exclusive nationwide bargaining unit could be the biggest raid of its kind in the federal sector in recent memory.” Inderjit Badwar, 1977 4/25 OK, Now Here's the Straight Story Federal Times

Although it is difficult to establish how well organized FAA management resistance to PASS was, interference with PASS's organizing efforts by managers around the country certainly let the fledgling activists know they could expect open opposition from the employer. Managers in various locations refused the new organization access to bulletin boards, or refused to allow PASS paraphernalia or documentation in their facilities. In some workplaces management went so far as to confiscate mail including PASS literature and member authorization cards.

In May PASS circulated its second newsletter declaiming loudly that it was:

“FAA/FASTA/NAGE VS PASS” PASS newsletter Vol.1 No.2

The battle for the hearts, minds and membership of the FAA technicians was joined in earnest when NAGE/FASTA initiated preemptory strike through a “unit consolidation” move which locked PASS out from petitioning to represent the Chicago ARTCC and Midway facilities for a year. It was clear that NAGE/FASTA



intended to employ this strategy of amending their petition to combine units as a means of perpetually blocking PASS's access to representation.

Despite that over 90% of the employees at the facility had signed "show of interest" cards for PASS and over 65% having already joined PASS, NAGE/FASTA working with the FAA was able to delay a vote. This was the first trick that NAGE/FASTA would pull out of their procedural hat to suppress the will of the bargaining unit, and delay PASS's challenge, but it would be far from the last, or the most notorious.

The PASS team executive board and PATCO organizers continued a barnstorming campaign to organize. In truth no team of this size could reach every facility in the country without the help of dozens of volunteers. In order to be successful it was imperative that the executive team initiate as many new organizer's as possible. Fortunately there were many latent activists among the technicians. Workers long frustrated with the blatant inequities took to the highways to tell their far flung fellows that a movement had begun. That if PASS won certification there would be someone representing them who understood the nature of their work, and the conditions they worked in. Someone to stand up for them the way PATCO stood up for the controllers. A chance for respect:

"The organizing committee would visit through Ohio and Indiana and all around Michigan. We got 70 to 80 percent to sign the petition for a new Union. We funded everything out of our own pocket." Galloway

1/11

As the summer rolled on, PASS published a July newsletter. It blasted collusion between the FAA and NAGE/FASTA and heralded the successes of the upstart Union in gaining membership across the country; PASS had organized twenty one

new locals since April. The newsletter also made clear that PASS was taking the offensive against the agency filing complaints on pay and demanding to meet to discuss concerns on staffing and equipment.

PASS also identified its first raiding objective; Chicago's O'Hare airport current home of the Teamsters. Though the Union represented no facilities beyond O'Hare, the International Brotherhood of greater Chicago was not known to back down from a fight:

“I was just elected regional vice president I found out the first local coming open was O'Hare and was represented by the Teamsters. That didn't make me feel real good! But we got through it!” Schneider 1/11

Toward fall the PASS activists were buoyed by the court decision which allowed them “Equivalency status”, the right to represent their members before the FAA on equal footing with the two largest Unions NAGE/FASTA and AFGE.

Whatever their excitement it was short lived as NAGE/ FASTA, motivated to action by PASS's startling successes in recruiting their members, rushed to sign a sweetheart contract with the FAA. Giving the agency concessions on bargaining rights ensured their support and despite the losses the agreement meant for the bargaining unit, the maneuver effectively delayed PASS's ability to get any election against their unit for years:

“When we almost had enough votes to win, FASTA ran in and signed a sweetheart agreement with the FAA blocking us for three years from the biggest piece of the pie. They thought this was a death stroke to us.” Johannssen 2/11

The tensions between the two Unions flared as NAGE/FASTA exploited every loophole to delay the impending loss of representation. The fact is that NAGE should have known the fate of Unions in the FAA who failed to represent their membership. PATCO had won representation of the air traffic controllers from NAGE employing exactly the same tactics PASS was now utilizing. I can only imagine the desperation NAGE President Stanley Lyman must have felt which drove him to reach out to PACTO President John Leyden in written request that they “join together”. Whether his intention was simple courtesy or a last ditch effort to cut off PASS’s funding Lyman was to be disappointed. Leyden rebuffed the advance:

“In as much as this is the first official correspondence I have received (from NAGE/FASTA) in my seven years as President, it came as quite a surprise... Possibly a more aggressive and forceful representation by NAGE/FASTA on its own would result in more respect by other federal employee Unions; an ability not yet found by you in retaining groups which NAGE/FASTA represents.” Leyden 9/19/77 Letter to Stanley Lyman NAGE/FASTA VP

Johannssen jumped into the fray directly castigating NAGE/FASTA’s lack of membership ratification requirement to the ‘sweetheart’ contract:

“I feel it is important that all AF employees have an opportunity to review the negotiated contract... I therefore demand that each and every member be given the democratic right to vote. Johannssen 9/28/77 Letter to Stanley Lyman NAGE/FASTA VP

The following day Lyman responded to Johannssen dryly:

“I have had a thorough examination made of our FASTA membership rolls, and we have not been able to find any evidence of your being a dues paying member of the organization. Therefore, as I am sure you should be able to recognize, you are not in any position to make any demands...” Lyman Letter to Johannssen 9/29/77

NAGE/ FASTA continued to work closely with the FAA to thwart PASS’s advance. Perhaps if they could squeeze the income stream by denying an election and therefore the holy grail of dues check off they might yet silence the upstart and have a chance to recover membership. Few beyond the inner circles of PASS would understand how close this strategy came to being successful.

Despite, or perhaps partially because of this flanking maneuver, PASS closed out its birth year having gained an impressive 15% of the technicians as dues paying members. Even more inspiring was the conclusion of their first successful raid against the Teamsters and the award of “exclusive representation” at Chicago O’Hare.

## **Chapter Eight: 1978 First Blood and the New Law**

“1978 was a turning point for PASS, the FAA and the aviation industry” PASS twenty year retrospective

The timing of PASS's win over the teamsters couldn't have been more helpful as the first annual convention assembled on January 16<sup>th</sup> in Dallas Texas. The attendees elected the first slate of 'permanent' national and regional leaders. Interestingly nearly half the seats at the executive board changed hands, but most were voluntary. In the highest profile of the contested positions Mark Schneider, on the heels of his success at O'Hare, won over Chuck Cage as the National Vice President. Dan Wood was elected to fill Schneider's old post. John Tucker chose not to run and Hugh Langston replaced him in the Midwest Region. Harry Chall had retired earlier in the year and the board's interim choice Leonard Michalski won his bid for the Eastern Region.

Aside from the elections the most pressing business facing PASS was covered in the address of John Leyden from PATCO who spoke to the delegates about the movement to pass a civil service reform law. Passage of this bill would codify of all the previous Presidential Executive Orders on labor/management relations into law. This legislation would also create a new body, the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) to oversee the relationship between federal Unions and the agencies. Among other duties this administration would have the responsibility for determining which Unions would be granted the rights of exclusive representation. The PATCO and PASS leadership understood how key the role of the FLRA would be in opening the future to PASS.

Shortly after the convention PASS and PATCO worked with the key Congressional committees they needed and, though late to the table, were able to affect the language of the legislation to neutralize one of NAGE's most effective tactic to date the unit consolidation.

When Johannssen returned to Washington from the successful and celebratory convention in Dallas there was a message requesting his attendance at an audience at the headquarters of the AFL-CIO. When Johannssen arrived he was taken to a room where George Meany AFL-CIO President and Lane Kirkland AFL-CIO Vice President were waiting to speak with him:

“I shook Meany's hand and he said; ‘Mr. Johannssen, you've shaken the house of Labor! Did you know that?’” Johannssen 2/11

Meany was not pleased at all with PASS's raid against the teamsters, and knew well that AFGE was targeted next. Meany made clear that PASS's actions were violating the anti-raiding clause of the AFL-CIO's national constitution and that he wanted the raids to stop:

“He said we had to cease and desist! We couldn't do what we were doing.” Johannssen 2/11

However dramatic the pronouncement may have been to receive it was not unexpected. The PATCO and PASS leadership had known full well that AFL could not sit idle while their affiliates were under attack. Johannssen stood his ground:

“Well Mr. Meany I respect you. And I respect AFL-CIO. But none of the Unions that have been representing us do anything for these members, so we're going to continue!” Johannssen 2/11

Johannssen left the meeting under threat:

“He told me that the wrath of the AFL-CIO would be upon us!”

Johannssen 2/11

The chastened PASS President reported the discussion back to his team, and PATCO leadership. PATCO agreed to let MEBA know about the encounter, but at the end of the day there were no changes to the PASS organizing strategy:

“We took a tactic of “Katie Bar the Door” We had to get these technicians into one national cohesive unit! Long 3/11

Meanwhile newly elected National Vice President Schneider worked to put in play another challenge against the agency on shift differential pay for the technicians. Challenges like this not only kept the agency on notice that there was a new employee organization in the FAA. PASS, like PATCO, would use every means to advance the concerns of its members. Aside from the obvious material benefit to the membership should PASS win such a challenge, even a loss in would serve to demonize the agency and demonstrate to members and potential members that this Union, unlike those which had gone before, would stand up for their interests.

In March NAGE/ FASTA leadership determined to intervene in overtime case PASS had brought before the agency. However with their increasingly Machiavellian twist they chose to enter testimony in support of the FAA position and against the interest of the membership. PASS wasted no time and reported the sordid details in the very next newsletter.

The successful execution of the PASS organizing strategy over the past year continued to produce new membership. By now the executives knew how difficult a task it was to conduct the daily business of a Union while simultaneously acting

as the organizing committee. They determined that the time was right to establish a full time internal organizing coordinator and filled the position with Larry Sump, the Western VP and early organizer.

PASS leadership also learned from PATCO the importance of a forceful presence countering the FAA on the legislative front. That spring President Johannssen made his Congressional debut before the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee and he came out swinging at the FAA:

“We do not believe the administration has carefully considered rational avenues to a more efficient, productive government, but has instead opted for the easy way out – fire a lot of people, move more around, and the apparent flurry of change will suffice for the reality of reform.”

Johannssen statement before the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee concerning H.R. 11280

Later on the day of Johannssen first testimony, PASS leadership learned that they had won the overtime dispute. The agency was ordered to not only change the way overtime was paid in the future, but retroactively pay technicians an amount conservatively estimated at three hundred thousand 1978 dollars. To round out what was becoming a very good spring for PASS the organization was certified as the exclusive representative for Oakland California.

At the start of the summer organizing attention in PASS turned to the Midwest. When PATCO was a start up Union they had learned to learn to make the most of the organizing dollar. The FAA had facilities across the country and it was not practical for organizers to reach them all. Instead PATCO focused on the natural gathering places, such as the FAA’s academy in Oklahoma City (OKC). Controllers spent long periods of intensive training at the school before being sent



to their first assigned facilities. The FAA paid for the controllers travel, food and lodging. PATCO knew that a keg of beer near the pool at one of the long term residences would draw in the weary students.

Long schools were common place too for the technician and PASS followed suit to in June when Johannssen and Schneider kicked off a series of informational meetings. While at these local organizers were able to make contact with students and carry on the conversation about PASS

“I would meet with the students regularly, on their time. I guess we played a pretty big part in organizing.” Mullins 1/11

It was in July that Mark Schneider had to follow Johannssen’s leap of faith in this new organization when he took his position as Exec VP in Washington. Schneider hear the same refrain from the agency – if he took his position at PASS he would be forced to resign permanently from the FAA.

“So I had to tell them ‘ I have been asked to report to Washington by my Union on July 4<sup>th</sup>. You know where to reach me on July 5<sup>th</sup>.”

Schneider 2/11

Like Johannssen before him Schneider wasted no time. His role expanded quickly and soon he found himself filling the roles of chief financial officer, meeting planner, editor for the newsletter, congressional lobbyist and of course full time organizer.

As the professional relationship of the two national officers’ began to emerge they recognized that their individual skills sets were complimentary. Johannssen was the consummate front man, spokesperson and commanding general. Mark was often the force behind the curtain whose organizational skills, steadfast

determination and unflinching assessment of the facts added balance and tempered the national team. The two men would successfully lead PASS as a team for nearly a decade into the future.

As another summer passed into fall the small team in Washington opened their headquarters near Capitol Hill. They didn't move far from PATCO, in fact they shared the same office suite. As the national officers settled in the Regional Vice Presidents, the national organizer, and an increasing number of volunteers continued their work to organize the technicians and grow PASS's membership.

In the fall PASS continued to win exclusive representation in more facilities across the country. Given the momentum of the day it is easy to see why the PASS leadership chose this time to begin the formal challenge against largest unit NAGE/FASTA represented. Once again the effort would require the gathering of signatures for at least 30% of the unit.

NAGE/FASTA responded with increasingly desperate counteractions. At the facility in Denver PASS had gained a majority in their show of interest.

NAGE/FASTA quickly sent in the required showing of 10% so that they too could be on the ballot for the election. However some of the technicians whose name appeared on the NAGE/FASTA petition reported that they had never signed with that group. An investigation revealed that NAGE/FASTA had forged many of the required signatures. The censure from the Department of Labor was swift and to the point:

“Your showing of interest is of questionable authenticity...I am deeply troubled by this incident. Such an occurrence, whether deliberate or inadvertent, has the potential for the destruction of the integrity of the processes of the Assistant Secretary, and gives the appearance of

reprehensible disregard for the purpose and policies of the Executive Order, which cannot be condoned.” John C. Jackson Acting Regional Administrator, Department of Labor 10/6/78 to Stanley Lyman  
Executive Vice President NAGE/FASTA

The DOL also precluded NAGE/FASTA from being on the ballot. PASS made the most of the faux pas distributing a special bulletin far and wide entitled: “Does it always have to be like this?” Unfortunately for NAGE/FASTA the answer would turn out to be yes as they would be found guilty of the same misrepresentation in future elections.

A more significant event of far reaching impact to PASS, and indeed all federal sectors occurred on October 13 when President Carter signed the Civil Service Reform Act into law. Despite discussion at convention and follow up editorials in the PASS newsletters many members of the day reported that the passage of this momentous act would go largely unnoticed at the time. But within a few short years PASS representatives would lead the way in exploiting the teeth of the law in their drawn out ballet to come to terms in their first agreement with the FAA.

As the year moved toward a close Bud Long had returned to PATCO where he was given the task of conducting the formal training for representatives at the George Meany Institute. Bud knew that the materials and techniques he shared with the controller representatives were desperately needed by newly minted PASS representatives. Whenever he had a seat available, even if they had to be shoe-horned into the classroom, Bud brought in the PASS members.

PASS organizers continued to encounter fierce opposition from an agency determined to curb the ambitions of the technicians:

“The hardest part of organizing was not getting caught at it! And if you did get caught do your best to get out of it! They had orders from the top to keep the Union out.” Mullins 1/11

Despite the resistance from the both the Unions and the agency PASS continued to win elections throughout 1978 against units of AFGE and NAGE/FASTA.

## Chapter Nine: 1979

Bureaucrats in Washington began the year assembling the organizations and policies required to implement the provisions of the CSRA. As testament to their progress the Federal Register announced that all Unfair Labor Practice cases were transitioned to newly established FLRA.

Meanwhile the PASS organizing efforts continued toward gathering signatures for the show of interest petition against NAGE/FASTA.

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, the second anniversary of PASS's formation, the feisty organization was awarded the decision in the night differential case and technicians were paid tens of thousands of dollars as a result. Pro forma by this time, PASS immediately heralded its success. The February newsletter also contained highlights of the new CSRA and told the members that PASS now had over 50 chartered locals across the country. This edition also provided an interesting perspective on the relationship between controllers and technicians. An open letter from President Johannssen to the membership of PATCO spoke of peace and cooperation, but served also to highlight tensions between the PATCO and PASS membership. Johannssen attempted to bridge a long standing professional divide:

“Oh yes, there is the old argument: Who's better? Well. Who cares? Is there anything unjustified in both professions being proud...?”

Johannssen 1978 PASS Speaks To PATCO

The subject of controller / technician relationships over the history of the FAA would be an interesting exploration for a psych doctoral, but for the purposes of underscoring the contributions made to PASS by PATCO I think it is fair and appropriate to acknowledge that tensions did exist in many workplaces:

“I have visited facilities where air traffic controllers and system specialists work hand in hand. I have toured facilities where the hostility between the two is tremendous.” Johannssen 1979 PASS Newsletter PASS Speaks To PATCO

Contributing to the tension was a disparity in pay grades. The controllers were classified at higher grades which irritated technicians whose jobs required long term highly technical training as well as years of prior experience. Add to this that the Airway Facilities Divisions (AF) held something of a second class status to the Air Traffic Divisions within the FAA. AT traditionally received the lion’s share of resources, and attention. AF technicians had often heard that there was ‘no money left in the pot’ for them. Compounding these issues was the daily interaction between the self assured personality types required to be successful air traffic controllers and the stick to the facts mentality of the technicians. Underscoring all this was the decade of PATCO successes for the controllers (some of which were seen as over-reaches by the technicians) where the technicians gained nothing. Topping this off was the fact that the controllers often referred to the technicians as “cellar rats and maintenance guys” and you have the recipe inter-discipline strife.

Bud Long and Johannssen had worked together since the earliest days to bridge this gulf. They attempted to simultaneously instill a sense of professional pride in the technicians while educating the controllers. Bud recalled one early scene at the NYIFR facility:

“So one day one of the guys (air traffic controllers) at my behest stood up in the middle of the room and said, ‘I need a maintenance guy!’ So Johannssen shows up in bib overalls with a broom and says ‘You need a maintenance guy, here I am! You want the radar fixed? Let me get rid

of my bibs and my broom and I'll come back!" It got the point across; he's not a maintenance guy. He's a professional like you." Long 3/11

Through the spring of 1979 PASS continued to publicize a series of victories, both in organizing and in legal decisions. One indication of the effect of these successes on the membership can be found in the spontaneous grass roots effort which occurred around this same time in the Detroit Local:

"The PASS members had grown tired of Air Traffic getting the media coverage for new equipment installations. The PASS local rented an airplane and invited Channel 2 in Detroit to fly a new landing system, the day before Air Traffic's media announcement. We all showed up with our PASS shirts on and Channel 2 reimbursed us for the cost of the airplane. They did a feature on PASS Systems Specialists and our equipment for a whole week!" Galloway, 1995 History of the Detroit/Michigan PASS Local

At the national level it was time for yet another annual convention, this one in Atlanta. Among other business the delegates in 1979 adopted a motto for PASS which still stands: "We will find a way or make one"

As proof to the axiom of politics making strange bedfellows the delegates of PASS heard from a freshman congressman from their host state; Newt Gingrich (R-GA). Some thirty odd years of record would seem to refute the positive sentiment the Congressman projected, but among other statements Gingrich:

"...commended our officers for their previous testimonies before Congress, and emphasized how much they needed future input from PASS" PASS Newsletter July 1979 Convention Highlights.

Mr. Gingrich seems to have subsequently lost his taste for Union input.

The July PASS newsletter opened with the bold headlines; “National Election Underway – Solidarity a must!” and starts with an article on the show of interest urging members to get at least an 80% show of interest rather than the 30% required by law. In retrospect this was clearly an effective organizing device which required the activists to speak to more members than they might have otherwise preparing the way for the actual election. The newsletter was interestingly prescient as it reminded the audience of the NAGE/FASTA tactic of continuing delays in the representational elections; NAGE would soon unveil its latest delaying maneuver.

Although overall PASS seemed to be conducting an effective campaign to educate, motivate, and organize the membership, the newsletter gave clues that the of technicians disharmony. Johannssen admonished the membership against:

“...the ‘tunnel vision,’ focused strictly on isolated and local issues...

We must no longer fight amongst ourselves.” A Message from

President Johannssen E. Johannssen PASS Newsletter 7/79

Whatever the squabbles among the troops the Executive board was clear of that the primary mission was organizing. The board presented the convention with an organizing plan that called on each of the Regional Vice Presidents to take a leave of absence from the FAA and spend the summer getting out the vote on the representational election. Johannssen would be the front man for the effort:

“I will be traveling throughout the nation so that everyone who wishes to will have the opportunity to meet with me and discuss the future of PASS.” Johannssen 7/79



So the summer of 1979 found activist members around the country trying to get as many show of interest signatures as possible:

“As metro Detroit PASS membership increased we formed an action travel team to get petitions signed (Show of Interest) in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana. We obtained approximately 75% of the employees.”

Galloway 1995 History of the Detroit/Michigan PASS local

Finally in August the process to request a representative election before the newly formed FLRA began. What was unknowable at the time was that the process would not be concluded for nearly three years. This meant that PASS would have to continually organize for this entire period. Because the Union lacked exclusive representational status there could be no agency check off for dues. PASS had to rely on members sending monthly checks to PASS headquarters and following up with those who were late. This created an administrative nightmare for what was essentially a one person accounting department. As word went out that dues income was increasingly important in weaning PASS off MEBA's funding the Detroit local found a creative solution to the fluctuating membership contributions:

“I opened a credit Union account for the local, and had everyone sign deductions for the dues amount to the credit Union. Then the local paid the national each month. Membership went back up to approximately 90 percent.” Galloway 1995 History of the Detroit/Michigan Local

In the closing months of 1979 Johannssen and Schneider continued to make PASS's presence known on Capitol Hill testifying before multiple committees. However an ominous indication of the fights ahead with the agency came when the FAA introduced a ten year plan for Airways Facilities in December which would eliminate some 3500 jobs in the AF Division.

## **Chapter Ten: The Election Period and the Apocalypse**

### **1980 - The Big Wait**

PASS started its third year in existence with a legal win for the bargaining unit involving the use of privately owned vehicles for travel to the FAA's Academy. But the victory was not long celebrated as the next round in the fight with NAGE/FASTA commenced. PASS expected delaying tactics from the opponent Union. It was also clear that the FAA was not pleased to see a potential affiliate of PATCO establishing a nationwide bargaining unit, and that they would work with NAGE/FASTA to avoid that eventuality. Less obvious were the delays involved in case proceedings through the newly formed and little exercised FLRA.

NAGE/FASTA's three year lock out was coming to an end, but it was not the end of the delaying tactics. Having already practiced the unit consolidation strategy to some effect in preventing local elections NAGE now sought to do the same on a wider basis. The new law seemed to clarify the issue but was basically untried. NAGE/FASTA was obviously going to exercise whatever tool was available to ward off PASS. They also utilized the new law to challenge, or "intervene" in PASS's petition for an election.

PASS continued to find itself in troubled waters. If the organization was to survive the delay it would have to maintain organizing momentum and hope to sustain a positive cash flow. Without certification PASS could not initiate dues check-off and was forced to expend scarce dollars on billing each member's monthly dues. MEBA and PATCO had been very generous to date, but those organizations could not afford to indefinitely bankroll the new Union. MEBA began to send a series of

letters requesting repayment of loans to PASS Vice President Schneider pressuring PASS to begin repayment. PATCO had also pulled back many of its organizers to aid in its increasingly militant struggle against the agency. PASS was increasingly left to fend for itself.

The PASS leadership, although sensitive to the concerns of MEBA and aware of the challenges facing PATCO continued to hold its focus firmly on the struggle toward certification. They had been successful in gaining representation right in units where NAGE had no presence, and continued to raid the membership of NAGE/FASTA in what had become an entrenched war of attrition:

“We continued to build in locations where FAASTA had the certification. We got everybody to drop out of FAASTA so we killed their money input. We had to tear away at their fabric.” Johannssen

2/11

With most of the action happening in the slow motion world that exists behind court house doors PASS focused its public energy on raising visibility before congress and the public. Leaders testified before congress in March, April, June, and August (2). Aviation coverage was in the news more frequently, in large part due to PATCO’s earlier efforts, and President Johannssen took advantage of the opportunity to appear on the American Broadcasting Corporation’s news show (ABC) Eyewitness Forum and later in the year on the CCN News network’s “Freeman Report”.

PASS also made its first international connections by meeting, and establishing a relationship with the International Federation of Air Traffic Safety Electronics Association, a worldwide representative body for technician.

Meanwhile FAA management was taking a hit before congress after it was revealed that they had under represented problems with the air traffic control system;

“(The FAA) deliberately deceived me and the entire United States concerning the severity of the airspace problems.” Representative Bob Whitaker (R-Kansas) As reported in PASS (1987) “We have found the way.” P7

If there was any doubt that PASS’s testimonies before Congress had gotten under the organizational skin of the agency, those doubts vaporized when FAA administrator Langhorne Bond lashed out at technicians in congressional testimony as:

“Featherbedders- an underworked, overpaid, disbanded group...” who should be met with “Good punishment”. Bond 1980 Testimony before House Aviation Subcommittee

This anger from an administration which had supported Labor efforts in many areas may be attributed in part to the activities of PATCO. Increasingly discouraged with the party in power PATCO had broken ranks and come out in support of the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. PATCO had received assurance from Reagan representatives that his administration would be sympathetic to their efforts, even if they culminated in a strike. As they prepared for their offensive PATCO attentions were drawn inward. John Leyden, longtime PATCO President and constant PASS supporter was gone. He resigned after a bitter conflict with the Executive Board around the question of an all out strike against the agency. Vice President Robert Poli ascended as the last President of PATCO.

“There was something of a sort of a parallel universe that was happening when PATCO was beginning to plan the strike.” Johannssen

3/11

After the elections the lame duck Carter administration gave the federal workforce a parting gift of 9.1% pay raise.

Unfortunately for PASS that did not translate to an immediate resolution to their growing financial concerns. MEBA was not only calling in old debts, but conflict within district one meant that the funding provided in the past could no longer be expected. The financial difficulties were felt most severely and most personally by the national officers.

“There was a lot of times I’d bring the check home and tell my wife, well hopefully we can cash it in three or four weeks...” Schneider

1/11

## 1981

President Ronald Reagan took office in January and swiftly moved to implement a pay freeze for federal employees signaling that, whatever his experiences as a onetime President of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) or promises on his behalf to PATCO, his administration would take a hard line against labor in the public sector. As evidence Regan appoints J Lynn Helms as FAA Administrator:

“Helms hated Unions, and he hated PATCO. He owned Piper and he had a plant up in New Jersey that was Unionized and rather than negotiate he locked everybody out, closed the plant and moved the work to South America.” Johannssen 3/11

For PASS the years of work to get an election paid off when the FLRA finally dismissed NAGE/FASTA’s intervention and set a date for the election for July 15<sup>th</sup>. PASS would now need to redouble its organizing efforts, despite a difficult financial climate.

At the end of the day on July 15<sup>th</sup> the combination of relentless organizing, effective public relations, and demonstrations of effectiveness in challenging the agency, accomplished by dozens of PASS activists, with the support of PATCO organizers, paid off in spades when PASS finally won the National Election by a margin of 4-1. The final tally was: PASS 4399, FASTA 1024, No Union 664.

“So across the country we had to win 13 separate elections. So we had to get people to sign petitions, and then vote for us, and we had to get them to turn out in masses. In every case not only did we win, but we won overwhelmingly and the turnout was like no other Union elections in the history of this country.” Johannssen 2/11

In August, in a display of optimism, or perhaps timely member relations, PASS nominated a team for contract negotiations with the FAA. The leadership also initiated a lobbying drive to counter the FAA recently announced reorganization.

It turns out that a resounding election victory was of limited short term benefit as NAGE/ FASTA, true to form, filed a petition challenging the election results and delaying the certification of PASS. Fresh out of law school attorney Joe Kolick had been assigned to work PASS. On hearing NAGE/FASTA's history of falsifying the signatures on their petitions Kolick devised a plan:

“They (NAGE/FASTA) filed their petition a week or two before convention. At that convention I got all of the delegates to give me signatures and it turned out that some of the names on the NAGE petition were the names of delegates. I sent those signatures to the FLRA.” Kolick 2/11

In addition to the certification battle PASS was also called to action to defend the technicians against a proposed Reduction in Force (RIF), or firing, of two thousand systems specialists. By the end of the summer PASS had succeeded in protecting reducing the number of technicians who were actually released to just over one hundred.

### **The PATCO Strike**

Before addressing the strike itself it is important to again consider the relationship between the systems specialists' organization and that of the air traffic controllers. The historical advances that PATCO had gained in terms of pay, working conditions, and the general respect its members received from the agency were

witnessed in the workplace by the technicians. There is strong evidence among those interviewed that PATCO's achievements received nearly universal admiration:

"The best recruiting tool we had at the time was the success of the PATCO controllers." James 1/11

"We couldn't help but look at what the controllers had in PATCO."

Demske 1/11

However in apparent contrast to this wide spread admiration, PASS had organizationally distanced itself somewhat during for the period of 1980 through 1981. Whereas the first three years of newsletters and mailings were replete with positive references to PATCO's accomplishments, after 1980 there were virtually no references to the potential for "affiliation" with the air traffic controllers, which had been a primary selling point in the early organizing. I followed up on this point with Johannssen:

"When the AFL-CIO got angry at us we realized that if we continued to go on about how close we were to PATCO and that we wanted to be affiliated; that would be enough for the AFL-CIO to say 'well this is a shadow group, they're really affiliates, and because they're raiding the various AFL groups like AFGE and the teamsters Art. 20's would be filed and would be substantiated. So it would have killed any organizing, we would have been done. So the strategy that I adopted was that we would just separate ourselves as best we could."

Johannssen 3/11



Publicizing this strategy would have also proved the case so PASS simply toned down the rhetoric regarding PATCO, but still intended to affiliate with them when they achieved national certification.

PATCO was now on the brink of another in an escalating series of job actions against the agency. They had been down this path before, and although their members who participated in the job actions had suffered some disciplinary actions, the overall result for the organization was an increase in their bargaining posture with the agency. Now PATCO believed the public was behind them and more importantly they had reason to believe that the new President, whom they supported in the election, would not intervene. It was one of the most profound and tragic miscalculations in labor history, and PASS leadership had a ringside seat:

“The last two hours that Poli (PATCO President) spent before going out to the press on Capitol Street and announcing the strike he spent with me. It was just him and I and we talked about everything. They had let me be part of everything.” Johannssen 3/11

PATCO had arranged the funding for PASS's successful organizing effort. PASS had shared attorneys, organizers, staff and office space with PATCO. The leadership of PASS was keenly aware of the strike preparations, but because of their raiding activity could not get involved.

In a speech at the PASS convention in May PATCO President Bob Poli told the PASS membership clearly that if the controllers went on strike, PATCO did not want the technicians to join them. Although not a popular position, PASS leadership complied with PATCO's wishes and when on August 3<sup>rd</sup> PATCO walked out - PASS crossed the picket lines kept working:

“They crossed the picket lines because we told them to go to work! Mike Rock, Bob Poli and I told PASS vehemently ‘It’s not your fight, stay out of it!’” Long 3/11

This was not an easy order for the many technicians to comply with.

“One of the hardest things we had to do was when PATCO went on strike and we had to tell our people to go to work. It was kind of like tearing your soul out.” Schneider 1/11

That PASS was told to cross the lines was not common knowledge outside the PASS/PATCO relationship and created some inter-Union tensions:

“You know I got a lot of crap from Unions; ‘You guys crossed the picket line!’ We did go to work but it was at PATCO’s request.”

Johannssen 3/11

Once the strike was announced FAA management, fearing that the specialists would interfere with the air traffic control system in support of PATCO, took drastic actions. Technicians were locked into their workplaces and were escorted by security agents whenever they moved around the facilities to complete their work, or even to use the cafeterias, or restrooms. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of August PASS sent President Regan a letter protesting the actions and pointing out that the technicians had done nothing to deserve this treatment.

On August 5<sup>th</sup> President Regan fired all 11,000 PATCO air traffic controllers. In addition to the obvious tragedy for the air traffic controllers, the technicians lost their benefactors, their supporters, and their friends in the workplace. On the brink of a long sought victory, PASS found itself suddenly facing the Agency alone.

## **Chapter Eleven: Negotiation Post Apocalypse**

PATCO was decertified and PASS found itself faced with negotiating with an agency with fresh Union blood on its hands. It did not bode well for the upcoming collective bargaining:

“We will be dealing with the toughest political climate that any organization within the DOT/FAA has ever faced!” Johannssen PASS times 10/11/81

Despite the catastrophic collapse of PATCO the fall of 1981 was not without some gains for PASS’s as the new attorney drove the stake through the heart of NAGE/FASTA’s last gasp challenge:

“It turned out that some of the names on the NAGE petition were obviously forged and the petition was dismissed due to a fraudulent showing of interest.” Kolick 2/11

As PASS awaited the final announcement of its certification the leaderships continuing work with congress paid off with the introduction in the Senate of The Airway Facilities System Specialist Act of 1981 (S.1930). This bill was crafted:

“To promote public safety by encouraging the employment of highly qualified system specialists by establishing a salary compensation system commensurate with skill and responsibility, by establishing a special retirement plan, and for other purposes.”

If the introduction of the bill served no other purpose it put the agency on notice that PASS still had friends in the Congress who were looking out for their interests.

PASS also received a decision in their favor when the comptroller finally ruled in on overtime, and awarded payments to technicians retroactive to 1974. These wins helped calm the technician workforce, understandably concerned that PATCO's demise meant the end of advancing their own interests against the agency.

Of course the biggest event of the year for PASS came on December 31 when at long last the PASS was certified as the Exclusive Representative in FLRA decision 7 FLRA 81.

“So across the country we had to win 13 separate elections, which we did! Every single one of them! We had to get people to sign petitions, and then vote for us, and we had to get them to turn out in masses. In every case not only did we win, but we won overwhelmingly; the turnout was like no other Union elections in the history of this country.” Johannssen 2/11

### **Prologue -1982: The Next Booklet?**

Shortly after certification Johannssen sent a letter to FAA Administrator Helms “We would be pleased to welcome this New Year and our certification with the ability to earnestly work together and resolve the problems that I feel we mutually share.” However the representatives of the agency, had just won the largest victory against labor in the history of the federal government and were in no mood to entertain this new nationwide group, whatever the FLRA directed. Like everything PASS has accomplished to date, the road to a contract would be much longer than anticipated.

“The real heavy lifting came after certification. I remember the first bargaining session. Joe Noonan, then director of labor relations for the FAA, opened the bargaining session saying something to this effect ‘I

welcome the Union's bargaining proposals; I will tell you in advance that whatever your proposals, the answer is no! I advise you that if you don't like that answer you should strike." Kolick 2/11

That story of that battle must wait for another day, but suffice to say that the leadership in PASS eventually found a way, or made one around this obstacle too.

PASS did not forget their friends from PATCO who had worked so tirelessly to help the technicians organize, in fact when they found themselves out in the cold PASS was proud to return the favor. Indeed Bud Long and Mike Rock would continue their association with PASS for many years to come:

"PASS hired me and Mike Rock as a special assistant(s) to the president. Mike and I were made lifetime members of PASS. Later I ran for National Vice President and was elected!" Long 3/11

### **Last thoughts:**

The story of PASS told through the recollections of its early members, organizers, and leaders is one that the members of today should be proud of. It is a story of a handful of activists determined to give a voice to the collective interests of the FAA's technical workforce. How they motivated technicians in their dozens, then hundreds, then thousands; until the goal of nationwide self representation was finally achieved. The strong foundations of our organization were laid by the efforts of all those early members.

When I joined PASS Howard Johannssen was still President. Mark Schneider was nearing the end of his time as Vice President. In my days as a PASS activist I have had the pleasure to meet many activists and leaders in PASS and worked with them

on the issues of the day. However I remained unaware that many had been involved in the founding struggles of PASS; not to mention the personal risks and sacrifices they were subjected too in those endeavors. I wish I had learned of the work they did on my behalf earlier in my career; I would like to have been able to thank them personally. Today too many of these early leaders have passed away and many more have retired. In fact there are just a few handfuls of the founding members left in our workforce. I encourage today's members to reach out and learn more of the stories of this organization. In so doing they will learn not just what has been, but the why of what is, and many ideas on how to continue our fine history into the future.

## **Summary and Conclusions On Writing this History**

“I always taught the reps that we are where we are because of the sacrifices and work of those who preceded us. And it was incumbent on us as labor to pass it forward to the next generation.” Long 3/11

The introduction to this project identified two formal objectives:

1. To document changes in public law which allowed the organizing of federal workers, which I submit, was accomplished through literature review.
2. To document the organizing story of PASS through interviews of early members. I feel that the interviewees I was able to reach represent a fair (although by no means complete) cross section of early PASS experience; from the leadership to the member at large in.

I have also had informal objectives in mind which included comparing the story of PASS as it had been related to me through oral tradition, to recollections of people with firsthand experience and a review of documents from the period. This is where this project was most successful. I accumulated over 30 hours of recorded interviews and extracted and sequenced hundreds of direct quotes to act as the framework of the story. I have begun good work on a narrative story of PASS's early years derived from the recollections of first generation PASS members.

Howard Johannssen was an iconic figure in the PASS story when I joined back in 1988. However many of the early joiners and organizers were unknown to me before undertaking this project. I was unaware of the depth of the personal and financial sacrifices Johannssen and Schneider made in the early years to keep PASS alive. Not only did these men resign federal positions with no guarantee that their new Union would be successful, they also sold and took liens against personal assets in order to keep the Union alive through the hard times. They quite literally put their homes on the line. Of course these were neither the only sacrifices made, nor the only members who made them. Indeed dozens of early activists are responsible for the collective successes of the organization. I heard many instances where members' dedication to PASS took tolls on their careers, their families, even their health. Every member of PASS should know the efforts made on their behalf, if only to understand the true value of their bargaining power today.

Most surprising to me was the fundamental role PATCO had in PASS's conception and infancy and how closely our two unions were intertwined until the day Ronald Reagan unilaterally terminated the employment of eleven thousand workers. I had heard the names of Bud Long, and Mike Rock, but I had no idea that these two men were so seminal to the organizing efforts of not one, but two nationwide Federal Unions. Additionally I was aware tangentially of PASS's connection to MEBA, but had no idea of the extensive resources and support that Jesse Calhoun



coordinated for our organization, without which PASS would never have come into being.

In my mind these stories need to be documented, and maintained as part of PASS's record. In so doing we help answer the perpetual question: "What has PASS done for me?"

Since beginning this process I have also had the chance to ask many of my contemporaries in PASS about their understandings of our early years. Some knew that we had been represented by other Unions, some did not. No one I have spoken with knew the depths of our connection to PATCO, or the exciting stories of our days as raiders extraordinaire. Certainly no one I have spoken to was aware of the intensity of the struggle to organize the first nationwide bargaining unit of technicians in the FAA. Within PASS I hope that the knowledge of our organizing story can be used as an aid in recruiting and retention efforts by building membership affiliation to the organization. I also believe that a more in depth exploration of the strategies and tactics employed by the early leadership would be instructive for any union seeking to expand representation in the federal sector.

This work as it stands cannot be considered an end product. Rather it should be viewed as a detailed collection of research notes and recordings from which a more readable and hopefully published history of PASS should emerge.

Given the nature of this work I think that it is appropriate to add a few aptly summarizing quotes from the interviews. First on organizing:

“I think that we learned many lessons, not just in organizing, but in organizing techniques. And we were very good at what we did, and I’m talking about all of us!” Johannssen 1/11

“Organizing is discouraging work, you gotta remember that. But you will succeed if you keep trying. You can’t ever give up.” James 1/11

Next on the nature of the people involved, and how they responded to the adversity of their organizing struggle:

“When you joined PASS you joined a group of people that took care of each other.” Galloway 1/11

“It was to test the metal, are these people going to persevere enough to succeed. I think the answer thirty something years later is... Yeah!”  
Schneider 3/11

There were also the stories of the struggle for the larger Union movement to accept that sometimes change, as painful as it is to go through, is necessary to advance the collective cause. In this case how AFL-CIO was able to set aside the original inclination to crush the upstart Union, and how they would later accept the newly recognized nationwide representative organization into the fold Johannssen would learn in later years why the threat of PASS suffering the wrath of the AFL-CIO never truly materialized:

“Jesse Calhoun told me ‘I went to Meany and told him if these guys win you’ll have them. If they lose you’ve already got them! It’s not costing anything... let it ride and see what happens.’” Johannssen 2/11

The organization of PASS has survived now for more than thirty years. This is almost three times as long as its benefactor Union, PATCO was on the scene. PASS owes that organization thanks not only for the early resources in money and personnel, but the strategic and legal guidance so vital to overcoming the numerous and multifaceted obstacles standing between the idea and the actuality of a nationwide bargaining unit of technicians. PASS also learned invaluable lessons in what not to do. How an over-reach could result in disaster, not only for the Union reaching, but for all those who might survive the backlash. Over the intervening years PASS has experienced a multitude of challenges. Each time the leadership and activists in the organization have risen to and overcome these difficulties. In order to continue this record of success into the future it is imperative that future leaders considers the historical record, not simply for the sake of nostalgic back slapping, but rather a sober consideration of the financial and human resources and potentially expanded timelines required to accomplish their strategic objectives.

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