

Communities and Postal Workers United (CPWU)

Summer, 2016 -- *No Closures! No Cuts! No Delay of the Mail!* - www.cpwunited.com

NEW APWU CONTRACT WINS MORATORIUM ON PLANT CLOSURES, RETAIL AND TRUCKING OUTSOURCING

After a two year struggle, the American Postal Workers Union won a number of victories, including upgraded working conditions, wages and benefits, plus significant gains for postal customers.

In an arbitrated award, the USPS was directed to halt all consolidations (closures) of mail processing plants, until April 2017, and suspend for one year all outsourcing of retail services to contract stations, Village Post Offices and Approved Shippers (although existing outsourcing, eg. to Staples Office Supply, is not affected by the award).

While the US Postal Service had demanded a new, bottom tier, non-career, flexible workforce, the APWU had fought for an all career workforce. The arbitrator did not allow a new bottom tier and directed the conversion of all maintenance and trucking positions to career, banned subcontracting of trucking for the life of the contract and directed the parties to evaluate 8,000 (private) Highway Contract Routes for possible return to union, USPS workers.

While career employees secured general wage increases and were guaranteed no layoff during the contract, non-career Postal Support Employees gained better conversion opportunities and improved wages and benefits.

PRESSURE FROM BELOW & ABOVE

The two year battle for a union contract included mobilizations on the workroom floor, in the streets, in the halls of Congress and at the bargaining table. From regular "union gear Thursdays" with t-shirts and stickers, to union-community pickets at Staples "post offices"; from protests, including sit-ins, at threatened mail plants – some organized by Communities and Postal Workers United – to field hearings by A Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service (organized at the initiative of the APWU); from union-community petitioning and postcards directed at USPS management to pressure on Congressional delegations; from community meetings with the Postmaster General and the threat of postal worker unrest; all these pressure points pushed the arbitrator to deliver a positive award.

ARBITRATION LANGUAGE

Here are some quotes from the arbitration proceedings which give a sense of the struggle.

First, from APWU President Mark Dimondstein addressing the arbitration panel, "...and to be blunt about it – if we had the right to strike today, management's economic demands of a new third-tier of career employees as well as their demands to expand rather than eliminate and reduce the non-career work force and destroy our COLA (which even in its current form doesn't even keep us up with the rising cost of living) would be strike issues here and now"

Further, Arbitrator Stephen Goldberg notes that "during the term of the 2010 Agreement, Postal Service efforts to outsource retail operations led to widespread conflict. Placing a temporary moratorium on these initiatives will create a climate more likely to lead to a mutually satisfactory resolution than will be present if new disputes are constantly arising." During the moratorium, the APWU is not supposed "to engage in any acts intended to prevent the Postal Service from successfully establishing or maintaining business relationships with potential or existing Approved Shippers, VPO or CPU program customers." That restriction may not, however, apply to the controversy over Staples, however. In a footnote to this provision in the agreement, the arbitrator adds, "I understand that the parties have a long-running dispute regarding Staples as a Postal Service retail partner. In light of that dispute, I am referring this part of this Award to the parties to assess how it will apply to Staples."

The arbitrator also warns the postal service it must conduct new feasibility studies prior to further consolidations of mail plants and "...the expiration date of the moratorium (April, 2017) should not, however, be viewed as a start date for further consolidations... hopefully time and some of the other initiatives in this Award will lead the parties to agree on *if and when further plant closing or consolidations should occur...*

OTHER UNIONS STILL NEGOTIATING

Meanwhile, as of press time, the National Association of Letter Carriers and the National Postal Mailhandlers Union, whose contracts expired in May, continue to negotiate with the USPS.



Over a hundred members and allies of St. Louis Gateway Area Local protest understaffing of sorting machines (photo APWU News, 6/27/16)

DOOR DELIVERY THREATENED

When Congress returns in September, the House may be voting on a bi-partisan, comprehensive postal reform bill, The Postal Reform Act of 2016, HR 5714. It mirrors S 2051, which solves the mandated pre-funding of retiree health benefits through integration with Medicare, but has a poison pill – pushing the elimination of at-the-door delivery (40 million out of 150 million total delivery points).

The National Association of Letter Carriers has stated that conversion from door delivery to cluster boxes would cost 80,000 letter carrier jobs, almost one-third of the letter carrier workforce. Which, of course, is why the USPS has been pushing for this conversion for years. But savings in labor costs would be offset by degradation in service and loss of revenue.

Conversion to cluster boxes would severely inconvenience many elderly and disabled customers, including many veterans, who would be forced to walk from their homes in the rain, wind, snow, ice, dark and other dangerous conditions.

At-the-door delivery facilitates quality service, such as individualized parcel and mail bundle drop off & pick-up. Door delivery enhances residential customer contact, which protects the health and welfare of neighborhoods, especially looking-in on the frail and seniors.

Door delivery facilitates business customer contact, leading to "Customer Connect" revenue opportunities. Without door delivery, home-based businesses, brick-and-mortar businesses and web-based businesses would choose to ship with UPS, FedEx or Amazon, who do delivery to the door. Door delivery also makes direct mail more valuable and facilitates e-commerce. Without door delivery, advertisers would migrate away from direct mail.

Cluster box mail receptacles are less secure than at-the-door and are more often targets for mail thieves. In curbside and cluster box receptacles, mail is more likely to accumulate day-to-day and more likely to be dropped on the ground, leading to litter problems.

LEARNING FROM THE CANADIANS

Fortunately, we can learn from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), who successfully beat back a Canada Post mandate to eliminate door delivery by paying postal workers lost-time to do community organizing. The CUPW trained and deployed postal workers to organize neighborhood canvassing, rallies, marches, hearings, pickets, occupations, media events, caravans and coalitions of those most impacted, including seniors, the disabled, veterans, and small business.

At its August convention, the NALC will consider a resolution to pay letter carriers lost-time wages out of the Letter Carrier Political Fund to organize in key Congressional districts, in consultation with the CUPW, to defeat legislation which includes the elimination of door delivery.



DETROIT POSTAL WORKERS GO PUBLIC AGAINST MANAGEMENT ABUSE

(excerpted from APWU Web News)

07/01/2016 - APWU members at the Metroplex Mail Processing and Distribution Center in suburban Detroit are taking a stand against an extremely hostile work environment...

Conditions have deteriorated over the past two years. Managers verbally berate employees, and routinely use profanity when addressing them. They often barge into the union office and treat stewards "like garbage," said Roscoe Woods, local 480-481 American Postal Workers Union president.

Things got uglier after management set up a "Meet and Greet" area late last year, where managers speak with workers at the beginning of their tour to discuss goals and hold service talks. The Meet and Greet was supposed to foster better communication, but it did the exact opposite, Woods said. Managers use it as an opportunity to berate employees and call out individuals for alleged poor performance in front of their co-workers.

Employees are often forced to work alone on sorting machines that normally require two people. When workers ask for a steward, they are denied representation.

"Management would berate those employees for not being productive, when they are basically running a 90,000 piece machine by themselves," Woods pointed out, adding that operating a machine this way jeopardizes safety.

Management's response to complaints about safety? Workers "are not working hard enough to be unsafe."

PREYING ON PSES

Woods noted that Postal Support Employees (PSEs) and newly-converted full-time regulars are bearing the brunt of the abuse.

"They tell PSEs that they can get fired in a heartbeat," Woods explained. "They don't ask you to do anything, they just bark orders. If you question anything, they throw you out of the building."

When PSEs attend union meetings, many ask that their names be left out of the meeting's minutes for fear of retaliation.

"It's a free-for-all around here and we are done with it," Woods said.

Management's worst offenders are protected and even promoted, he added.

TAKING A STAND

After filing multiple grievances and working his way up the ranks of management to the area vice president – with no results – Woods amped it up a notch.

The local reached out to Rep. Brenda Lawrence (D-MI), who attended a recent union meeting and heard workers' concerns firsthand.

Woods also sent a "climate survey" to every member of the local. Within a week, the union received more than 175 responses – and they painted a "very dismal picture" of work at the facility.

Woods shared the results of the survey with the local TV station, which ran an exclusive story. "The overwhelming majority call it a 'toxic work environment' – circling words like 'hostile,' 'tense,' and 'difficult' when answering questions," the station reported.

The local also distributed buttons that say simply, "RESPECT," which managers see throughout the day, beginning with the confrontational "Meet and Greets."

The next step is taking the issue to the Postmaster General, Woods said.

"I am tired of people talking to me, I want people to do something," he said. "They are trying to jam our stewards up. They are baiting us and they are going to great lengths.

"I am going to keep riding this until I run out of ideas," he vowed. "I am not going to let this stand. It's ridiculous."

APWU President Mark Dimondstein commended union members. "Workers have a basic right to dignity and respect at work. We applaud Roscoe Woods and the workers of the 480-481 Local for standing up and fighting back."



*Postal Heritage Day celebration and protest in Portland, Oregon
(photo Northwest Labor Press, 7/26/16)*

KEEP UP ON THE LATEST FIGHTBACK!

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AGRANDALLIANCE.ORG

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NORTH DAKOTA SENATOR FIGHTS TO "FIX MY MAIL"

(excerpted from Grand Forks Herald, by Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, 7/31/16)

I'm excited that Postmaster General Megan Brennan has accepted my invitation to visit our state.

Folks across the state, from the Bakken to the Red River Valley, tell me they don't experience the reliable and timely service they rightfully expect.

During Brennan's visit, we'll be touring the Bismarck mail processing center so she can see the effect that changes and scale-backs at the Minot mail processing center have had on operations in Bismarck. We'll also sit down with community and business leaders to hear directly from folks whose livelihoods are impacted by the chronic mail challenges we face in North Dakota.

When I launched my Fix My Mail survey in February to get feedback and data on how North Dakotans think the Postal Service is performing, responses flooded in. Already I've heard from more than 500 North Dakotans, many with major mail problems.

Those stories led to my Rural Postal Act, which I introduced to improve rural mail service. My bill would put a two-year freeze on closing additional processing centers, protect six-day mail delivery and rural post offices and improve service to make sure folks receive mail on time.

PETITIONS, PASTOR AND NAACP WIN MAIL DELIVERY

(excerpted from Daytona Beach News-Journal, 7/25/16)

BUNNELL — Take a drive through south Bunnell, in the five blocks or so around East Drain Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard, and you may notice something that's never been there before: mailboxes — more than 120, shiny and slick.

It's the first time in many years that some residents in this neighborhood can hope to have mail delivered to their homes, rather than renting a post office box.

The Postal Service has continued to resist delivering to this area, even after a more than year long battle that began with a local pastor.

Postal Service representatives say the residents haven't followed the proper procedure to get their mail delivered, even after multiple petitions. Residents and members of the Flagler branch of the NAACP say the Postal Service flat-out refuses to deliver there.

Daisy Mae Henry is pastor at the Spirit of Truth Outreach Ministers, a church on Elm Street. She's also a fixture at the historic Carver Center, a community gathering spot a few doors down from her home on Drain Street.

Henry said she struggled for months with local postmaster Shawn O'Sullivan to get mail delivered to her home. She gets mail now, but not before she argued with postal officials, contacted the Flagler NAACP and collected signatures from neighbors on a petition that O'Sullivan said she must have in order to get mail delivered to her home.

O'Sullivan declined to be interviewed for this story. However, Postal Service spokeswoman Debbie Fetterly wrote in an email that O'Sullivan's "priority is to provide outstanding service to all of his customers," and that he is not resisting delivering to Henry's mostly black low-income neighborhood

ASK YOUR REPRESENTATIVE:

Co-sponsor HR 784 & H.Res 54 for recovery of delivery standards, H.Res. 28, which supports retaining door delivery for businesses and residents, and oppose HR 5714, which eliminates door delivery.