



Lobbying fails again: Senate Democrats vote for 5-day mail delivery in bill S.1789

Organize, unite and resist!

Stop management/Congress war on postal workers and public service!

Bill S.1789 recently passed the Senate. It's a devastating attack on postal workers and postal service to the public. Among its worst features is it sanctions 5-day mail delivery. Senate bill 1789 also goes along with much of management's plans to close or partially close thousands of post offices and processing facilities and wreck public service. The bill would lead to eliminating 100,000 jobs according to the NALC. And bill S.1789 sanctions brutal cuts in Worker's Comp benefits to thousands of injured workers. The bill's main difference with management is merely that it delays some of the massive job and facility cutbacks for a while. Postal workers and services are still on death row — only the date of execution has been slightly delayed.

So continues the combined efforts of management and Congress to destroy postal workers and the post office as an institution serving the public. In the Spring of 2011, the APWU leadership convinced workers to accept a disastrous contract, doubling the number of low-paid temporary employees, making future career employees into second-class workers with much lower wages and benefits and requiring many present career employees to accept irregular work schedules instead of a normal 40-hour week. The NALC contract is currently in arbitration, and it's likely that the arbitrator will agree to harsh concessions on workers similar to the precedent set under the horrible APWU contract.

Meanwhile, management has announced its intentions to eliminate 220,000 jobs, including 120,000 layoffs. They revealed their intentions to close thousands of post offices and eliminate most processing facilities and Saturday delivery. Recently they decided to save some post offices but at the cost of cutting the hours at about 13,000 offices with the great majority open only 2 or 4 hours a day. Senate Bill 1789 is a step in helping management's dreams come true. It passed due to overwhelming support from the Democrats. Indeed, President Obama now endorses 5-day delivery.

As usual, the Republican-controlled House is putting forward even more devastating attacks in line with management. Republicans Issa (Ca.) and Ross (Fl.) are proposing legislation to undermine union bargaining rights and create new government panels with the power to shut postal facilities at will and impose major cuts to postal worker wages and benefits. House Republicans just passed Rep. Ryan's bill to cut postal and federal employees wages via increased worker payments to retirement funds.

Union leadership's dead-end policy

What does this history tell us? It shows that the fate of postal workers cannot be entrusted to the politicians of either party. But our union officials deny this. Yes, we are told horror stories about the Republicans. But then we are told that the Democrats are the alternative. Senate Bill 1789 and Obama's support for 5-day delivery should dispel that notion. Even the union officials admit that these particular stands are a problem. But they pretend that these are mere flaws, not part of a fundamental anti-worker stand that created the present budget problems in the first place.

The union hierarchy never tires of pointing out the budget crisis of the USPS would disappear were it not for ridiculous requirements imposed by Congress in the 2006 postal reform bill that makes the USPS pay \$5-6 billion each year to cover retiree benefits 75 years in advance. But they "forget" to mention that this 2006 bill was overwhelmingly supported by both capitalist parties, Democrats and Republicans alike (and the NALC leaders at the time).

No matter what, the leaders of all the postal craft unions insist the solution is vote Democratic, campaign for them, send millions of dollars to them, become an activist for them, etc. But if we accept the union leaderships' advice, we would avoid the Republican anti-worker steamroller only to be bled to death by our back-stabbing Democratic "friends".

Similarly, the union leaderships find ways to embrace management. Sure, they complain constantly about how foolish management is. But they and management share the same basic goals. They both know that the postal service is losing money right now mainly because of the robbery of the postal budget by certain government agencies. But they both cooperate to make the workers pay for this robbery. That's why, for instance, the last APWU contract included multi-billion dollar contract concessions. Insofar as the union officials offer any resistance to management, it's almost always confined to filing a grievance, where unjust regulations and unsympathetic arbitrators ensure that justice is often denied.

The way forward: rank-and-file resistance

We are told by the union leadership that however disappointing the Democrats are, the Republicans would be worse. We are advised that however hard workers are hit by union concessions, management wanted even more concessions. But the idea that there's no other alternative is wrong.

The rank and file can establish their own agenda, their own organizing, and their own methods of fighting, independently of the union bureaucracy.

Certainly an immediate priority is to save 6-day delivery and end the \$5-6 billion dollar annual robbery of the postal budget. As well, we should demand an end to cuts in wages and benefits, cuts in jobs, increased workloads and the replacement of full-time workers with low-paid temporary workers.

Postal service to the public must not be cut just because it saves money, or as currently happens, postal management merely asserts it saves money, but only if there is no hardship to the public. Plans to slow mail delivery times and access to post offices should be abolished. Indeed there should be improved service and an increase in the workforce to provide that. The \$5-6 billion robbed from the postal budget should be allocated for the workforce and service to the public. Should budget shortfalls remain, government funds should be allocated. (If the government can find trillions for profit-mad banks and give billions to private auto companies, it should grant funds to the postal service, which is supposed to be a public service.)

Such demands are a viable alternative, and even the union leadership would agree with some. However, they are not willing to wage a serious fight for them. For this, the rank and file will have to develop new

forms of organization among themselves. That can begin with forming networks at a particular workplace or between workplaces. Such groups can hold meetings to discuss what issues to concentrate on, what forms of struggle they can carry out, and how to spread the struggle. Leaflets can be written to expose management and the pro-capitalist politicians' attacks on the workers and the ways the union leaders are selling out. Distribution of leaflets can be used to mobilize more workers into resistance and to link up with like-minded workers elsewhere. Distribution at post offices, in working class neighborhoods and schools can help win allies.

As the rank-and-file groups develop and spread, the ability to carry out mass struggles will grow. On the rare occasions where the union leaders stage a protest, the rank-and-file networks can bring a militant outlook into it. Likewise this can be done at union meetings. Management can be confronted wherever they hold public meetings on closing facilities. Recently retired postal workers, Occupy activists and others marched around and inside a post office in Portland, Oregon.

The initial forms of resistance can prepare for the bigger battles that will be needed to stave off the onslaught of management and both political parties. We will need serious actions inside and outside the workplace mobilizing the workers of all crafts, not begging hat in hand every so often before the politicians.

We should be inspired by the national wildcat strike of 1970 and subsequent wildcat strikes later in the 70s. We should be encouraged by recent actions of the Occupy movement where thousands of workers blockaded ports on the West Coast in order to win demands of longshore workers and truckers. Postmaster Donahoe and the capitalist political parties will not relent out of kindness, but only if they are forced to.

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