

Detroit Workers' Voice



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Five-day mail delivery slashes postal jobs and public service

On Feb. 6, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced that starting in August there will be no Saturday delivery of mail except for packages. It's estimated this will eliminate 25,000 jobs. Six days of work will now have to be done in five, intensifying the exploitation of the workforce. And service to the public will continue to decline.

Some in Congress may challenge the legality of Donahoe's move because in the past Congress has legislated the number of days mail is delivered. But Congress does not oppose Donahoe's basic goals. The Democrats mainly back a bill that would establish five-day delivery a couple of years from now. The Republicans have their own 5-day bill. As for Obama, he announced support for 5-day delivery in 2011. The only problem was that political bickering has prevented any of the bills from passing yet. So Donahoe decided to start putting the bill's proposals into action on his own.

Five-day delivery is part of management's anti-worker onslaught supposedly necessary to solve the \$16 billion postal budget deficit. This includes massive wage cuts for new workers and the elimination of 186,000 jobs since 2006. But these "cures" have nothing to do with the cause of the budget woes. The deficits are overwhelmingly the product of a Congressional bill passed in 2006 that required the post office to pre-fund retirement health benefits for the next 75 in a mere 10 years, something unheard of in private business and government agencies. Were it not for the exorbitant pre-funding requirements the present crisis would not exist.

Management itself has opposed the pre-funding of health benefits, but this does not place them on the workers' side. In the five years prior to the present crisis for example, about 83,000 career jobs were cut as management's way of avoiding budget problems. Management may not like having to cover the expenses imposed by the health care pre-funding. But, as always, it demands the workers bear the burden of the crisis.

Postal workers are being run over time after time, and the strategy of the leadership of the postal unions has proved completely ineffective in stopping this. Yes, the union leaders sometimes have snappy criticisms against management. But they collaborate with management. Thus, when new contracts with management help the USPS decimate the workforce, the main union officials hide the setbacks or justify them. Insofar as there is struggle against the USPS bosses, it is within strict limits. Organizing the rank and file for struggles within the postal facilities is avoided. Public actions of any kind are rare. Militant action that would really press management is off limits. The union leaders do not even try to get basic union rights like the right to strike.

Instead of reliance on the workers' own actions they are told that salvation will come with the election of Democrats. Workers are told to give money and campaign for these so-called

"union-friendly" politicians. And in the end, these same politicians sell the workers down the river. Is it any wonder management is slaughtering the workers!

The road forward

The survival of the workers depends on taking up the course of class struggle, not collaboration. This will not spring up instantly, but now is the time to begin organizing in this direction. Rather than rely on the union leaders to give up their sellout policy, rank-and-file workers must see that they themselves are the only ones they can rely upon. What sorts of things can be done?

Concerned workers should get in touch with each other to form workplace groups. Connections between such groups can develop. Through these groups, the rank and file can express their own views and decide what course of action to take. Views opposing management crimes and the sellout union leaders can be spread via leaflets, social media, etc. not only in the post office but to other workers and the community. This helps draw more forces into the struggle.

The rank-and-file organizations must break through the limits imposed on mass collective action by the union bureaucracy. When contract concessions hit one craft, the rank and file can build united protests of all crafts. Likewise, united protests can help temporary workers abolish their separate and unequal status and encourage them to join the struggles of career workers. Management attacks on workers in general, like the huge increase in facility closings, job losses, overwork and cuts in public service due to 5-day mail delivery also need to be opposed by united actions.

The type of actions will vary according to the needs of the struggle and the strength of worker organizations. Pickets, marches, community meetings, work slowdowns, walkouts, and

National Day of Action Save America's Postal Service

"Catch the Spirit of 1970"

Sunday, March 17, 2013

(anniversary of the Great Postal Strike)

Fight closures! Fight Cuts! Fight Delays of Mail!

Called by Communities and Postal Workers United

-for more info, see www.cpwunited.com-

National Day of Action to Save Six-Day Delivery

Sunday, March 24, 2013

Called by the National Association of Letter Carriers

(NALC) - (local events yet to be determined)

-for more information, see www.nalc.org-

strikes are among the means to fight management. The ability to hold protests without union permission need not stop us from attending union meetings or rare protests which will allow us to reach more workers.

Presently there are few places with organized opposition to the sell-out union leadership. We need more groups, and with a

NALC leaders hail disastrous anti-worker contract arbitration ruling

On January 10 an arbitration board issued a 4-1/2 year collective bargaining settlement between USPS management and the letter carriers union, the NALC. The settlement is a betrayal. But the next day NALC president Frederic Rolando glorified this sell-out, saying “this agreement rewards city carriers.” Let’s look at these so-called “rewards.”

Big leap in cheap temporary labor, present TEs screwed

Rolando brags that this new settlement has “no two-tier pay scale”. Wrong. Besides creating a cheaper extra tier for new career carriers, the settlement would create a big new temporary labor force called City Carrier Assistants (CCAs), which itself has two tiers. CCAs will replace the present TEs (Transitional Employees) and expand the non-career work force limit from the previous 3.5% to 15%, or 20% if the USPS attempts new ventures. CCAs do normal carrier tasks. But they are hired only for 360 days. Whether they get rehired is up to management as are, with minor restrictions, the number of hours they get to work. CCA wages for workers not previously in the post office start at \$15/hr., inadequate for a stable if very modest existence. Pensions, health benefits and employee rights are limited or non-existent.

The treatment of former TEs is scandalous. They aren’t automatically converted to CCAs. They first have to take a challenging test which tells little about whether they can do the job they have already proven they can do. If they fail the test, they’re out of a job. If the TE does become a CCA, their wages will drop almost \$6/hr., barely higher than the other CCAs. What a great system!

Unlike the past, no one can hire in as a career letter carrier. First you must serve your CCA sentence. No one knows if they’ll ever become a career worker. It could take many years during which it’ll be tough to avoid financial ruin. No one knows if they’ll even be many career jobs opening up. Management abolished 40,000 carrier jobs from 2007 to 2011. The only sure thing is the CCA will have a hard time keeping their heads above water.

Massive pay cuts for new career letter carriers

If a CCA makes it into a career job, they will find its wages are far less than those of career workers hired before the settlement. Rolando himself states “the award lowered the entry wage for new career letter carriers” and “created a new step progression”, i.e. a new pay scale! New career carriers’ entry wages will be over \$9,000 lower than those in the old contract. The new career letter carrier wages will slowly creep forward toward the previous wages over 12.4 years, only becoming roughly equal at the point where present carrier wages have attained their top incremental step. Again the new workforce is stabbed in the back!

Present career carriers not spared

Present career carriers may feel bad that new carriers will be screwed, but may think that won’t affect them. That’s not so. Once management gets lower-paid career jobs and still worse off CCAs they will press that *all* career workers get lower pay and benefits.

clearer stand. It will take time and effort to build a coordinated struggle to stop the attacks on us. For now our victories may be small. They may just be stopping management from harassing a worker or forcing the union officials to stop management from violating the contract. But small wins can draw in workers. Worker resistance can start here! <>

But what of the other “rewards” for present career workers? No wage hikes for the contract’s first two years, no COLA for the first three years. Tiny increases in wages and COLA thereafter. Worse, the share of payment for health care premiums by USPS decreases from 80% to 76% for present career carriers while for new carriers it goes from 77% to 76%. *This means not just an increase in the percent paid by carriers, but the percent paid of greatly increasing premium rates.* NALC literature tries to hide this saying a family insurance plan policy of \$15,000 would “only” cost an additional \$600 by contract’s end. Actually, if we take into account the average rise of premium costs in 2010 or 2011 (between 7-8%) for FEHBP insurance plans, the increased cost the first year will be around \$1,000 and around \$2000/yr or more at the end of the contract.

Job cuts and overwork

The big issues of job cuts and overwork are, shamefully, not even a topic of contract settlements. Since 2000, the USPS has eliminated about 270,000 career jobs, counting all crafts. This has meant huge workload increases. For carriers, routes have become much longer. Workers are pushed to the breaking point, long-term injuries multiply. Besides that public service suffers and the unemployment rate rises.

Union leadership sellouts and rank-and-file resistance

Thus, management won big over the letter carriers just as clerks were hammered in their last APWU contract which was quite similar to the carrier settlement. But the union leaderships don’t care how much they have to deceive the rank and file. They make speeches declaring that the postal budget problems aren’t due to the wages of the workers. Yet the NALC leaders proclaim victory when wages are cut 25% and a fifth of the workforce will be so-called “assistants” with pitiful hourly wages and no guarantee of work hours. They shout “Save the Post Office”, but this slogan for them only means supporting the massive elimination of career workers which will result in closing post offices, reducing their hours of operation and lengthening mail delivery times. Only a leadership of sellouts could act this way.

Enough! Postal workers have been beaten down. But anger toward management and the union leadership remains.. It’s time for ordinary workers to begin organizing themselves. The long, hard road to developing real worker resistance should begin now!
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Website: www.comunistvoice.org

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