

Detroit Workers' Voice



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Fight back against the anti-worker campaign! ***USPS management declares war on postal workers,*** ***and also cuts postal service***

Postal management recently sent two “White Papers” to Congress, urging them to change the law in order to squeeze postal workers. Management wants to eliminate 220,000 career jobs by 2015, slash health and retirement benefits, convert a lot of the labor force into temporary workers, and be free to violate union contracts. It also wants to stop delivering mail on Saturday, and to close thousands of post offices and hundreds of postal processing centers.

Only a few months ago, management and the APWU negotiated a contract with massive concessions. Workers reluctantly approved it, being assured by the union leadership that at least it would preserve the “no layoff” clause for most present employees. Now management wants Congress to let them rip up the “no layoff” clauses and other guarantees from the contracts with all postal unions.

Postmaster General Donahoe and crew have shown they are backstabbing liars. They said that jobs will be saved if workers accepted concessions. But capitalist sharks that they are, obtaining concessions has encouraged them to cut jobs, the same way that sharks are encouraged by blood in the water.

Postal workers, we must resist this onslaught! There needs to be mass protests demanding justice for postal workers and the maintenance of postal service. There must be no illusion that management is working with us to preserve the post office. Nor are the politicians on our side. The only difference between the Tea Party and the Democrats is how far to squeeze us. We need to be prepared for struggle.

Mass layoffs and plant closings

Management plans to get rid of many workers and to force others to become temporary workers. It boasts that it has eliminated 212,000 career positions over the last 10 years, but it wants even deeper and faster cuts. It put forward these plans in its “Workforce Optimization” plan. Over the next four years, it intends to eliminate another 220,000 career positions: 100,000 by attrition, and 120,000 by lay-offs. The plan envisions that this will result in “a workforce by 2015 of 425,000, which includes approximately 30% lower cost, more flexible, non-career employees”.

This means not only eliminating jobs, but creating new categories of workers who do the same work for much less pay and without job security. It means converting many jobs to temporary (“non-career”) status. “Non-career” workers would presumably be either the old-type super-exploited casuals or the new PSEs (Postal Support Employees – i.e. workers who are paid so little they would need outside “support” to raise a family).

Management aims to accomplish this, not only with overwork, but also with extreme centralization. It is cutting the number of mail processing facilities from 508 to under 200. This is likely to harm service, as well as disrupt the lives of many postal workers.

Slashing health and retirement benefits

The USPS's other “White Paper” calls for slashing health and retirement benefits. Management wants to withdraw from the

present federal health and retirement systems and establish its own bargain-basement system. Management promises that this would hardly affect the quality of present retirees’ health benefits, but it’s hard to take this promise seriously. Meanwhile, for present workers, management wants to move to cheaper and worse health plans, and to jack up the percent of health premiums paid by employees. New employees are to fare even worse. For example, presently PSEs don’t get any health care coverage at all for their first year at the post office. They are treated as throw-aways, who can be replaced at will, so why bother paying for healing them?

Retirement benefits would also be cut. The post office wants to withdraw from CSRS (the Civil Service Retirement System) and FERS (the Federal Employees Retirement System) and rig up its own system. Present retirees, or those near retirement (“near” is left undefined), would supposedly see little change in benefits. Trust us, says postal management. But workers who are not near retirement age would see big benefit cuts. And new hires, even if they are career workers, would get no defined pension benefit at all. All they could do is contribute part of their wages to a 401K-type plan. But how could they do that when their wages won’t be high enough to live on? New worker wages have already been slashed in the APWU contract, and similar cuts are expected for other crafts.

Gutting collective bargaining rights

In order to accomplish these things, postal management wants to disregard union contracts. To start with, it wants Congress to allow it to unilaterally cancel the “no layoff” clause that currently protects career workers with over six years of seniority.

Worker rights are already limited because powerful business interests control the country. Postal workers, for example, have no right to strike. Now postal management is joining the right-wing politicians around the country who want to stifle or eliminate any collective bargaining. Indeed, Republican Congressmen Darrell Issa (Ca.) and Dennis Ross (Fl.) have introduced a bill that would undermine postal union bargaining rights. Instead, new anti-worker government panels would be created with the power to shut down postal facilities and impose, year by year, yet more cuts in worker wages and benefits.

Cutting service: closing thousands of post offices

Postal management is also going to slash postal service. It already plans to close 3,700 post offices, based on the income they bring in. This means that poor, minority, and rural communities will be hit hardest. The USPS is supposed to provide universal service, but that will be a thing of the past. Low-income and minority areas will be discriminated against.

Management also wants to eliminate Saturday delivery. This will cause a lot of inconvenience, and also slow mail delivery.

Moreover, postal workers are understaffed and overworked. So when management lays off workers and pushes the remaining ones even harder, this will hurt service as well as postal workers.

Robbing the workers in the name of a budget crisis

Postal management says it has no choice, because it's lost \$20 billion dollars in the last four years. But there's actually plenty of money available to avert the immediate postal crisis without attacking the workers.

For years, the post office has been robbed by various government agencies. An estimated \$50-75 billion has been overpaid into the federal retirement system over the years. And since Congress passed the Postal Reform Act of 2006, the post office has become the only government agency required to pre-fund future retiree benefits; indeed, it is supposed to take only 10 years to fund 75 years into the future. Since then, the total of the extra payments required by the 2006 law equals the postal deficit. Thus, if income generated by the post office was merely returned to it, the postal budget crisis would be over for the time being.

But will Congress allow the post office to get its own funds back? Don't count on it. Congress sees squeezing the workers as the answer to every budget problem. True, Bill S.1010 introduced by Democratic Senator Carper (DE) would provide access to much of the robbed funds. But it also allows management to cut back to five-day delivery, thus eliminating thousands of postal workers; and it would bias collective bargaining so that postal management could win all its anti-worker demands in the future. Well, HR 1351 in the House would simply return the robbed money. That would be better. But does anyone expect it to pass the Tea Party House? If it does, it is likely to be heavily amended along the lines of either Issa's HR 2309 in the House or Carper's S1010 in the Senate.

This country produces enough to pay good wages to every worker, in the private or public sector. So why isn't there any money to pay fair wages or provide good services? Well, for one thing, inequality has grown from year to year, and now CEO's make hundreds of times what a worker makes. A bonus for a single CEO can equal the year's pay of several hundred workers. Where do you think that money comes from? The way the CEO's and billionaires keep increasing their incomes, is by squeezing the workers.

What's happening is that all across the country the capitalists have been cutting jobs, wages and benefits for private and public workers alike. Once they drive down the labor costs for one section of workers, they declare employers elsewhere are paying too much. So this is a class-wide battle between employers and workers. It's in the interests of all workers, public and private, to unite to defend their wages and benefits. Maintaining (and raising) compensation for one group of workers helps lift up all workers.

Fight the anti-worker crusade

Postal workers, we can't rely on those who are oppressing us! We can't rely on postal management to do the right thing if only the stolen postal funds are returned. We can't rely on the politicians: the Tea Party hates us, while the Democrats are seeking bipartisan agreement with them. They are both parties of CEOs, not workers. We need to appeal to other workers and the public, and to show that we are willing to stand up for our own rights. We need mass action! For a start, there should be national and regional demonstrations against management and Congress!

For this to take place, we will have to rely on our own initiative, not the sellout union leaderships. Look at the APWU leadership! A few months ago they touted the recent contract as a way to save jobs. They gave up \$3.8 billion dollars in concessions to postal management. They told workers to trust that management would not take advantage of contract loopholes that permit workers to be "excessed" to jobs hundreds of miles away. They said, don't worry about contract language that permits workers to be forced into 30-hour/week jobs. And don't worry about a starting a new system of glorified casuals (PSEs). No, they had a handshake deal with management, and this deal was supposed to save jobs. And the result?

Now management is asking Congress to keep the concessions, but eliminate 20% of total jobs, and have a third of the remaining jobs converted to second-class or even casual status.

The NALC leadership isn't any better. For years they have cooperated with management in lengthening letter carrier routes and cutting down the number of jobs. Thus, in their recently issued "talking points" on the budget crisis, the NALC leadership brag that "The Postal Service and its unions successfully adapted to the recession, cutting more than 110,000 jobs."

What the union leaderships call fighting, is putting resources into electing pro-management politicians that betray us. It's a farce. Sometimes they first support a politician, and then later have to denounce the same politician as the devil, as when the NALC leadership supported the bitterly anti-worker Republican Darrell Issa last year. (See the list of endorsed candidates on p. 10 of the Sept./Oct. 2010 issue of the NALC's *Postal Record*.) This year workers are demonstrating, and quite rightly so, against Issa and his congressional bill, HR2309.

The Republicans are usually portrayed as anti-worker, which is true, but are the Democrats much better? Obama has frozen wages for federal workers and accepted the Republican line that trillions of dollars in social programs need to be slashed. He insisted that the auto workers see their wages and benefits slashed as a condition for the auto bailout. Is he likely to treat postal workers differently from auto workers? But the same union leaders who earlier this year told us to trust in management, are now telling us not to worry: Obama will prevent any anti-worker bill from being passed.

We need serious resistance to management plans. Yes, we should take part in any demonstrations organized by the unions against various politicians, and try to give them a militant character. But we shouldn't restrict ourselves to lobbying politicians, but prepare for serious struggle. We can begin by forming networks of rank-and-file activists at the workplaces. This can help postal workers get together to meet and decide which types of mass actions can be developed. It can help ensure that workers ourselves decide what to do, and aren't held back by the failed policies of the present leaders of the postal unions.

We can reach out to other workers, showing how our fight is part of the struggle of all workers, private sector or public. If there are public hearings on closing facilities, we should use them to spread the real story about what is going on in the postal service. Distributing leaflets that tell the truth about management and the pro-capitalist politicians can play an important role in encouraging mass resistance. And workers from different workplaces and different crafts, career and non-career, veterans and new hires, should make links, and strive to coordinate their efforts.

In 1970, rank and file workers had to wage a wildcat strike to win basic negotiating rights and respectable wages and benefits. Today postal workers face a similar challenge. We need to again have a bold struggle at the workplaces and in the streets.

***Defend our jobs, wages and benefits!
Defend postal services – fight station closings
and save six-day delivery!
Make the capitalists sacrifice, not the workers!
Public and private sector workers, unite!
Fight back against the anti-worker campaign!***

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