



## **As contract negotiations intensify:**

### **Watch out for two-tier wages and other concessions!**

APWU contract negotiations are heading into their final phase. The old contract expired on November 20. The union and management have agreed to extend it three times already as they continued negotiating, but at some point they must either reach an agreement or declare an impasse. As usual, union leaders are keeping workers in the dark about what is going on in negotiations. But a few bits of information have leaked out, and they are ominous indeed.

The APWU leaders pretend they're surprised by the extreme concessions demanded by management. Are they serious? Management has been loudly proclaiming the need for giant concessions. Meanwhile, management has been slashing jobs and ruining workers with forced relocations. In fact, the national economic collapse has meant that across the country companies have been hammering workers. Just as these companies want to restore their profits by driving down the workers, so postal management wants to balance the postal budget on the backs of the workforce. But rather than prepare the workers for struggle against contract concessions, the APWU leadership acted as if negotiations would automatically go well for the workers.

#### **Just look what's going on in the current negotiations!**

But look what's going on in the current negotiations. The same union leaders who promised to fight against concessions are now telling us a freeze on wages and benefits would be fine. Worse yet, they are considering accepting a new, proposed, two-tier wage structure. Detroit APWU president Ulmer announced this at a recent union meeting, and essentially supported these shameless measures.

Actually, two-tier would be a disaster for postal workers. In the past, the union has accepted semi-two-tier contracts. The union has allowed some hiring of casuals, who are paid less, and newly-hired career employees are paid less in the beginning. But new-

hires do catch up; the use of casuals has been restricted; and the wage differential between clerks and mail processors has been eliminated in recent contracts. However this new two-tier system means accepting a **PERMANENTLY** lower class of employees. It would mean that future postal workers will barely eke out an existence on substandard wages and benefits. What sort of future will the upcoming generation of workers have when auto, postal and other jobs that provided a relatively decent living become relics of the past?

Right now, with the virtual hiring freeze for clerks, it might seem that putting the two-tier system in place won't affect much. But after years of attrition and forcing older workers into retirement, management will eventually have to replace many workers. The two-tier system will give management a new cheap labor force. But this won't mean any relief for the older workers. In fact management will be motivated to go after older workers more intensely than ever, to force them out to make room for new, lower-paid workers. Terrorizing older workers on attendance and injuries will reach a fever pitch. And organizing to oppose management will be more difficult than ever, as management will use the inequalities between different workers to pit younger and older workers against one another.

#### **Politicians side with management**

Meanwhile the politicians supported by APWU leaders have been uniting with management to attack APWU workers. Union leaders told us to go all out in support of Democrats in the recent congressional midterm elections. But what are the Democrats doing to support postal workers during these critical negotiations? None of them has a word to say in our support. And Rep. Tom Carper, the Democrats' leader on postal issues, is pushing a new bill in Congress that will give legal support to management's anti-worker positions. True, Carper's bill will relieve postal man-

agement of the need to pre-fund retiree health care payments. This gives desperately needed budgetary relief to postal management. But Carper's bill also gives management the right to cut back mail delivery from six days a week to five. This would result in a massive loss of jobs and undermine service to the public. As well, the Carper bill would require contract arbitrators to side more than ever with management concessions demands.

Carper's bill is somewhat like the General Motors-style bailout. Yes, the USPS gets some help by the government relieving it of prefunded retiree health care (which the post office never should have been required to pay in the first place). But the workers get smashed, by eliminating thousands of jobs and requiring arbitrators to go after workers' pay and benefits. The bill doesn't explicitly insist on cuts in wages and a two-tier system (as the government did at GM), but it does the next worst thing, requiring arbitrators to take seriously management demands for such cuts.

APWU and other postal unions have expressed opposition to Carper's bill, as they should. But APWU also rallied support for Carper and other Democrats in the recent elections. The union has been barking up the wrong tree, channeling workers' money and energy to support anti-worker politicians. APWU leaders could have spent the last year preparing for a serious contract struggle, but no, they spent it schmoozing with Democratic politicians who were planning to cut our throats.

### **Organize opposition to management's demands!**

Delegates at recent APWU conventions have overwhelmingly voiced opposition to two-tier. In 1998 delegates voted to not even consider two-tier in any upcoming contract. And just recently, at the 2010

convention in Detroit, delegates *UNANIMOUSLY* voted against consideration of a two-tier contract. Based on this sentiment, union negotiators have no right to even consider accepting two-tier. If they do accept such a contract and submit it to the membership for ratification, workers should not hesitate to vote it down.

But workers should not just wait to vote on a contract. We should be actively organizing to oppose management's demands. We should be rousing support for our contract struggle from our own ranks and from other sections of the working class. Workers everywhere are looking hopefully for signs of struggle against the present wave of cutbacks. And along with our struggle for a decent contract we need to develop a political struggle in the interests of working class people. This will require a break from the scab Democratic Party politicians and developing an independent political movement of, by and for workers.

**No to any two-tier contract!**

**Prepare to fight concessions! []**

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