

Communities and Postal Workers United (CPWU)

SPRING 2020 -- *No Closures! No Cuts! No Delay of the Mail!* - www.cpwunited.com

FIGHT FOR HAZARD PAY ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE AND POSTAL FUNDING

We, the undersigned elected union representatives (shop stewards, alternate shop stewards, executive board members, local officers, national business agents, etc.) call on our national unions – APWU, NALC, NPMHU, and NRLCA – to mobilize our members and demand of the USPS and Congress:

HAZARD PAY. As COVID-19 spreads across the country, the danger on the job increases exponentially. Those who continue to work should be paid hazard pay.

ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE. With our lives at risk, administrative leave (beyond limited emergency sick leave) for all workers who need to isolate or self-quarantine instead of coming to work. This pandemic is similar to a community disaster, like a flood, fire, or storm, an “Act of God” as defined in USPS Employee and Labor Relations Manual, 519.21.

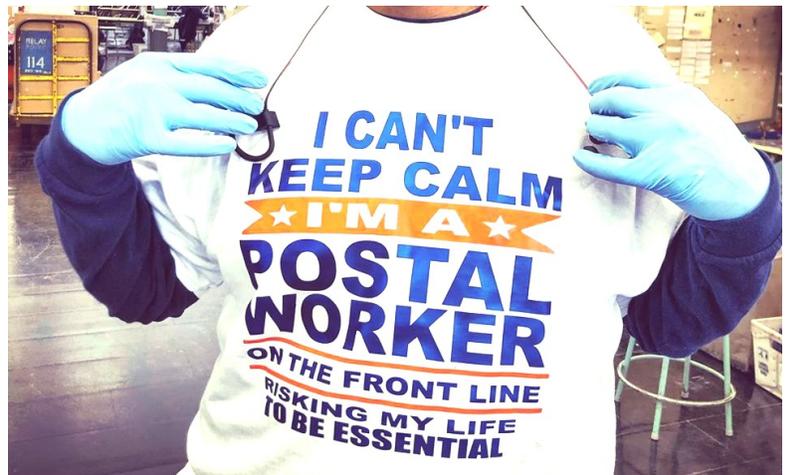
FUND THE USPS, FORGIVE THE DEBT, END THE PREFUNDING MANDATE. Pass the Protect Our Post Offices Act (HR 6425), which would provide \$25 billion in emergency appropriations to the Postal Service. Eliminate the Postal Service’s current debt. Pass the USPS Fairness Act (S2965) which would end the prefunding mandate.

SIGN HERE (if you are an elected union representative) —
bit.ly/Fight4PostalWorkers
(find the initial signers by clicking on the link)

The letter above now has over a hundred union stewards and officers signed on. This letter, created out of a facebook poll, is the latest effort of “Postal Workers Covid-19 Response” in the struggle for safety and workers’ rights during the pandemic. In mid-March a rural letter carrier from Knoxville, TN created an online petition called “USPS Must Ensure Rights and Safety for Employees and Customers During COVID-19 Pandemic” calling for Personal Protective Equipment, social distancing, alternative delivery for vulnerable customers, emergency sick leave and hazard pay.

Within 48 hours the petition had close to 50,000 signatures with 31,000 from postal workers. Stunned by the response, the carrier reached out to Labor Notes, a national organizing center. Their director, Al Bradbury, who had been instrumental in helping Communities and Postal Workers United organize in 2012, reached out to postal workers across the country to help found “Postal Workers Covid-19 Response”. We sent the petition to PMG Brennan (no response yet), established a facebook page for postal workers which now has 18,000 members, and have organized weekly Zoom calls on Sunday evenings.

We want to hear your experience, whether its struggling to get masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfectant wipes, plexiglass shields, establish social distancing, respond to Covid-positive outbreaks in your facility or organize public pressure on the USPS and elected officials. If you are a postal worker, join the facebook page (Postal Workers Covid-19 Response) and look for the link to join our Sunday calls.



THE PLAN: ORGANIZING YOUR FACILITY FOR SAFETY VS. COVID-19*

- You must **talk to EVERYONE** about The Plan
- Find an “organizer” in each department (work station, aisle, shift)
 - Ideally, about one organizer per ten co-workers
 - That’s your “organizing committee”
- Agitate** – “This pandemic is life and death. If not for you, for a co-worker, for your family, for their family, for our customers”
- Explain -- The Plan**
- *Set up a text message group (WhatsApp or whatever works) for each department and for the organizing committee
 - *Everyone agree to report if they have symptoms
 - *Everyone agree to help investigate who was in “close contact” with the infected co-worker
 - *Everyone who was in close contact agree to immediately self-quarantine for 14 days
 - *Insist that management deep clean the facility if there is a confirmed case
 - *Work out the “paper work” later
 - DON’T WAIT for testing, doctor orders, CDC/local health authorities, USPS Nurse, type of leave, notifying management
- Get agreement** from each person, get their name, worksite, shift and phone number for the text network
- Follow-up**...when a co-worker has symptoms,
- Did they report to all? Did contacts self-quarantine? Did management deep clean?
 - Did management retaliate against anyone? How do you respond together?
 - Who needs to talk to whom to strengthen the solidarity?
 - Do you need to organize for a “refusal to work in dangerous conditions” if management doesn’t deep disinfect?
 - Keep the network together for the next struggle

*adapted from “Secrets of a Successful Organizer”
at labornotes.org/secrets

REVIVING THE SPIRIT OF 1970 GREAT POSTAL STRIKE*

by Jamie Partridge, NALC retiree

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary (March 17 - 26, 1970) and accomplishments of our brave comrades who walked out in the Great Postal Strike, let us look at the social and economic context that made this feat possible. And let's look at our present circumstances for comparison.

1970 was a time of great social and labor upheaval.

The civil rights and Black power movements, buoyed by a wave of urban rebellions, led the federal government to hire many young African Americans into the postal service in hopes of calming the uprisings. Recruiting vans toured poor Black neighborhoods, signing people up (Rubio, Philip F. (2010). *There's Always Work at the Post Office: African-American postal workers and the fight for jobs, justice, and equality*). Veterans preference in hiring at the post office brought in Vietnam War veterans, many of whom were pissed-off at what they had been forced to do in that far-off land. The anti-war and Black freedom movements had penetrated the military by the late 1960s.

"You had the whole country going against authority. You had a revolutionary spirit in the country. People didn't worry about laws. You were out there spouting your grievances to try to make conditions better. That's the environment we were in," explained New York City letter carriers' rank-and-file leader, Vince Sombrotto. ("*The Strike at 40*" – NALC *Youtube*)

Into that volatile mix, add the late 60's strike wave among public employees which was sweeping the nation's cities. Teachers, sanitation workers, transit workers and others were striking, often illegally and against the directions of their union leaders (wildcat strikes). This was especially true in New York City, the epicenter of the Great Postal Strike.

The 1970 strike shut down the financial sector – Wall Street, legal contracts, checks, insured and certified letters. The government was hesitant to arrest strike leaders for fear of arousing sympathy among other workers, and because of popular support for the strikers (*Times Wire Service, March 20, 1970*). After eight days, President Nixon caved and we know the results: massive improvements in wages, benefits, and working conditions with the right to collective bargaining extending almost to the present day.

I say "almost" to the present day, because wages, benefits and working conditions have been steadily deteriorating since the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 and the Great Recession of 2008 sent the USPS into a tail spin. Today we have lost a quarter of the postal workforce, half the mail processing plants, and work longer hours with heavier loads. Almost 25% of postal employees are lower tier, low pay, low benefit "non-career" assistants.

In 1970, letter carriers walked out because they were working for poverty wages. In 2020, over a third of CCAs are "walking out" because of poverty wages, exhausting loads and hours, bully supervisors and more. "Walking out" by quitting, as individuals. What would it take for CCAs to turn that "walk-out" into united, collective action? What would it take for career carriers to join them?

Look at the social and economic conditions. The rent is too damn high. Wages too low. Health care and education costs rising. Young people rebelling -- from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter, from the Bernie Sanders campaign to the Women's March, from immigrant resistance to the climate strikes.

As in 1970, there is a "revolutionary spirit in the country". 2018 and 2019 saw the largest strike wave in 40 years, led by public sector teachers, with many of the strikes illegal and wildcat. The Covid-19 crash is seeing walkouts in every sector.

The NALC membership is not immune to this economic and social turmoil. What if President Trump's wish list were implemented by a new Postmaster General: major changes to mail processing, frequency and mode of delivery, cuts in salaries to match other federal workers, permitting private access to the mailbox, increasing employee retirement payments while cutting retiree benefits. What would it take to provoke a strike? Massive layoffs? Ten hours days? Health benefit/pension/wage cuts? Privatization?

But aren't times different now? With decline in first class mail and so many other parcel delivery services, wouldn't postal customers just go elsewhere if we went on strike? Canadian postal workers, with the same mail mix and the same parcel delivery competitors, continue to strike and make gains in their wages, benefits and working conditions.

KEEP UP ON THE LATEST FIGHTBACK!

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SAVETHEPOSTOFFICE.COM

AGRANDALLIANCE.ORG

APWU.ORG

NALC.ORG

NPMHU.ORG

NRLCA.ORG

But could a postal strike create a national crisis again? All first-class mail (bill paying, financial transactions, contracts, legal documents) plus 30-40% of parcel deliveries go through the USPS. That's a healthy piece of economic clout.

The NALC national constitution has a provision for use of the strike weapon, when called by the national president or executive council (Article 14, sec. 4; Article 16, sec. 2), and several national conventions have passed resolutions calling for our right-to-strike and elimination of the no-strike clause in our collective bargaining agreement. For several decades after the Great Postal Strike of 1970, the NALC maintained a Strike Fund.

But striking is still illegal, right? It was illegal in 1970 too. It was illegal for Canadian postal workers back then too. When we asked the Canadians at a Labor Notes conference how they got the right-to-strike, they said "by striking." Canadian postal workers struck (illegally and wildcat) in 1965, 1974, 1975, and 1981. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) use creative tactics, such as "rolling strikes" (striking a different location every day) which messes with management, not hurting the customers so much.

Canadian postal workers are often ordered back to work by judicial injunctions or parliamentary actions. Their leaders have been thrown in jail for defying these orders. But the CUPW continues striking and most recently have won major upgrades for rural carriers through a gender-equity strike. That strike included actions by other unions and community allies, organized by CUPW to avoid fines and jail time. Community pickets blocked trucks from entering postal facilities while allowing other postal workers to "go to work", thus complying with back-to-work orders.

Solidarity actions by community allies and retirees would not be illegal for the NALC, if not officially sanctioned by the union. Fortunately, there are obvious bottlenecks in the transportation of mail. And the public loves to support their postal workers. Such actions could even be organized on a local level for local settlements, to solve staffing or mandatory overtime issues. We have recent examples of community/retiree occupations in 2013 – of the Salem mail processing plant and the Springfield plant – which were followed by a still-in-effect moratorium on plant closures. Strikes, occupations, and blockades could be powerful weapons in today's struggle to save our postal service...just sayin'...

**disclaimer: this article is not advocating an illegal strike or slow-down*

Editors note: Conditions in the postal service are changing rapidly, from day to day, as the Covid-19 pandemic explodes across the nation. As of this writing, April 3rd, close to 1,000 postal workers are off work due to contracting the virus or being in quarantine. Six postal workers have died from Covid-19. New York City, the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States, has some postal facilities with three-quarters of their workers home sick or quarantined. Some areas of the city have not received mail delivery for days. For the latest about the struggle for postal worker safety and rights, go to apwu.org/coronavirus, nalc.org/news/covid-19 and the facebook page "Postal Workers' Covid-19 Response".

ASK YOUR CONGRESS PERSONS TO Support HR 6425, the Protect Our Post Offices Act, to inject \$25 Billion into the postal budget and forgive the debt. Plus S 2965 to remove the pre-funding mandate for retiree health benefits.