

Defend the Public Postal Service, Good Jobs and our Communities

Statement by the Revolutionary Organization of Labor, USA, May 15, 2010

“Messenger of Sympathy and Love
Servant of Parted Friends
Consoler of the Lonely
Bond of the Scattered Family
Enlarger of the Common Life
Carrier of News and Knowledge
Instrument of Trade and Industry
Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance
Of Peace and of Goodwill Among Men and Nations”

--Inscription on the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian

As the United States Postal Service (USPS) has carried out its mission over the many generations it is little wonder that the people of the United States continuously rate it the most highly regarded government entity. Enshrined in the U.S. Constitution as a right of the people, the Postal Service has served the population with universal and uniform service no matter class, geography, nationality, age or gender. Over the last 40 years, following the “illegal” 1970 postal strike, postal workers, through their unions, have had good livable-wage jobs in every community in the country.

Now, the deep capitalist economic crisis has become the smokescreen behind which Corporate America and its government servants are attempting to slash wages, benefits, rights, worker safety, public service and unions. On March 2, 2010, Postmaster General John E. Potter, citing a litany of problems and worst case scenarios, projected cumulative losses of \$238 billion over the next ten years if no changes are made to the USPS. His answer is to *cut service*, cut jobs of people serving the public, reduce postal retail outlets and mail collection and *most significantly, eliminate Saturday delivery of mail. At the recent National Postal Forum, Potter floated the “trial balloon” of four day a week delivery by eliminating Tuesday delivery as well!* Such a measure would make every letter carrier in the country a part-time worker.

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds” is the “motto” most identified with the USPS. If postal management and its corporate backers get their way and convince Congress to change the law requiring six day delivery, add the words, *“except on Saturdays” and maybe “except on Tuesdays!”*

Postal management has unleashed a barrage of propaganda surrounding the effort to cut six day delivery. They used a skewed poll by USA Today which “results” showed that most of the U.S. people were favorable to dropping a delivery day. Then on April 13th the General Accounting Office (GAO) weighed in echoing the pessimistic

projections of the USPS and calling for reduction in service beyond those proposed by the USPS. The GAO envisions moving the USPS to a “private corporate model,” increasing the percentage of part-time and flexible employees, allowing the USPS the “flexibility” to adjust to workload. This latter position would push 500,000 unionized postal workers back to the position of casual labor, back to the days before the 1970 postal strike when “collective begging” rather than “collective bargaining” was the plight of postal workers. (By the eve of the Postal strike many career postal workers were eligible for food stamps.)

National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) President Fred Rolando justly condemned the GAO report as a “full throated attack on collective bargaining, our contractual COLA clause, our contractual limits on contracting out and our contractual protections of full-time career positions.”

Remarkably, virtually none of the facts and figures cited by Postmaster General Potter, postal management, the GAO and USA Today/Gallup poll to attack the wages, hours and working conditions of union postal workers and service to the public is true.

In testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Postmaster General Potter admitted under questioning that the \$238 billion number is “theoretical”, and the GAO admitted the same, stating it was “by far a worse case scenario.” Congressman Connolly (D-VA) concluded, “It looks, frankly, a little bit like a **scare tactic to get us to make some decisions.**” (ROL emphasis) The top Republican on the Senate panel that oversees the Postal Service, Susan Collins (R-ME), voiced concerns that the USPS’ plans to end six day delivery could set off a “death spiral.”

The questions asked in the oft cited USA Today/Gallup poll did not include alternatives other than cuts to the postal service. The loss of one day delivery was the least draconian “alternative.” The vote by the people polled was *intended to save the other five days*, as 87% of those polled stated a favorable view of the Postal Service!

Ruth Y. Goldway, Chairperson of the Postal Regulatory Commission, exposed PMG Potter before Congress on April 15th: “The basic outcome of all these ideas is that there may well be less mail and less Postal Service... an axiom in the business community is that a company cannot cut its way to success... the plan’s proposals seem likely to spur further declines, a downward trajectory that suggests further shrinkage of the system, with mail and this fundamental communication infrastructure disappearing in tandem.”

Why would the top official of the USPS deliberately point the USPS toward disintegration and dissolution? The answer lies in the march toward postal privatization driven by the corruption of private profit. As a non-profit entity, the USPS brings in over \$70 billion a year, enormous booty for private industry to get their greedy hands on. Direct forms of contracting out services such as mail equipment repair, contract postal stations, transportation and selling of stamps have already been used to undermine union wages and benefits. Much corporate welfare has already landed in the hands of profiteers like pre-sort companies and the large business mailers who profit from excessive discounts which actually cost the USPS money, i.e., a bailout for the big mailers. A long standing deal made with corporate giant FedEx feeds their coffers with fat contracts for flying U.S. Mail. And FedEx boxes were placed in front of most Post Offices, directly advancing private competition, a deal made under Postmaster General Henderson's reign, after he ran the USPS Memphis District, home of FedEx.

Efforts to reduce six day delivery is the largest threat to date for postal privatization. Private, mostly non-union companies like FedEx and Pitney Bowes, are waiting in the wings to fill the void. In that event, what service the public receives will depend on whether profit can be made.

Unfortunately, the leaders of the postal unions plan to "fight" the proposed reduction of six day delivery mainly by relying on the monopoly capitalist Democratic party. These opportunist leaders are unwilling and/or unable to carry out the **mass mobilization** required to defend the postal service and good jobs.

Just last year the Japanese people voted out of office the political party which had had a monopoly over Japanese politics for the past 50 years. The people were outraged about the privatization of their postal services, which included banking and insurance services. They voted for the "Democratic Party of Japan" which was committed to reversing (and in fact has reversed) postal privatization. *We in the United States can learn from the experience of the Japanese citizenry and stop further postal privatization, especially on the cutting edge issue of defending six day delivery.*

The Revolutionary Organization of Labor, USA calls for a united front coalition of postal workers, customers, community leaders and organizations, all of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win unions and local elected officials to: ***Campaign to keep six day delivery and universal mail service, with lobbying, press conferences, informational pickets, letter writing campaigns, etc.***

The campaign should include the following:

- Demand the removal of Postmaster General Potter and to replace him with a *defender* of our national treasure: the public Postal Service.
- Educate the public and postal union membership that the elimination of Saturday delivery is "the slippery slope" that will lead to the *disappearance* of the public USPS.
- Force an end to corporate welfare – the "bail out" of big mailers who receive excessive mailing discounts while the working public pays their fair share. All mail worked in the Post Office produces better service, cheaper rates and better jobs. In comparison to purchasing power in 1900, the actual cost of stamps has gone down 17%.
- *Build unity of all postal unions*, working together at the local and national levels to save the postal service, stop the union busting and engage in joint bargaining over the upcoming union contracts. This struggle leading toward the merger of postal unions into one postal union will provide the workers and their community allies maximum power to defend the service and the jobs.
- Fight for the placement of basic banking and insurance functions into the 37,000 USPS stations and branches. This will provide these needed services to the people on a **non-profit public basis**. It will nationalize part of the banking monopoly that is criminally responsible for the economic crisis. (Postal Services all over Europe and Japan have provided banking services for many years.) Walmart and other large retailers are currently jockeying to become licensed to do just this, on a for-profit basis. Fight for the **public option!**

During the summer of 2009, the rising tea party movement, backed by insurance and pharmaceutical company money, roared and raged against any "public option" during the debate over health care reform. Right wing radio shock jock, Glenn Beck, has emerged as a major political figure with his message of selfish individualism and bitter hatred toward all things "community."

The Postal Service is "community." So much so that V.I. Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution, pointed to the post office, even under capitalism, as an example of how socialist order could be carried out after workers gain power. The battle to save the *public* Postal Service is a battle for "community". It's part of the way forward to workers power and socialism, a society run for the good of all working men and women of all nationalities.

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