



Is there enlightenment at the end of the tunnel?

Active letter carriers have spoken. They have voted by 9-to-1 to ratify the 2006-2011 National Agreement. Unfortunately, in the minds of many, the fight is over, the victory is secure, a multitude of very serious concerns have been overcome, and job security, the survivability of the Postal Service, retirement and health benefits, and workroom floor contractual rights are all now embedded in granite. NALC activists know better.

NALC e-Activists and legislative lobbyists know that the challenges they have taken on over the past several years have taught them that our rights to bargain collectively for wages and benefits could be swept away by an ill-conceived bill passed by Congress and enacted by an anti-union president. They realize that educating House and Senate members on the importance of maintaining both a strong Postal Service that can serve all Americans, and preserving the rights of letter carriers to have a collective bargaining procedure with redress through binding arbitration by a neutral party, is critical. They know that the danger of losing those battles never goes away and that their role in NALC's legislative efforts is ongoing and difficult, but is immeasurably rewarding to not only themselves, but everyone who works for and everyone who uses postal services.

NALC branch officers and stewards know the contract is only worth the paper it's printed on unless it is policed and enforced. Those brothers and sisters know that their efforts oftentimes are only as good as the support they receive from the other letter carriers in the delivery unit(s). They are acutely aware that the key to support is educating the membership to what the contract says, what it means, that an injury to one is an injury to all, and that every letter carrier on the workroom floor should provide support to every other carrier to ensure contract compliance and solidarity. A united workroom floor makes it easier for branch leaders and stewards to provide stronger leadership and much better representation. Leadership, education, representation and support: concepts that rely on each other to be successful.

Union representatives understand that managers will constantly test their will by attempting to bend the rules in the collective bargaining agreement so they can meet goals that oftentimes conflict with contract compliance. Misapplying overtime rules, understaffing of an office, inappro-

priate inspection, analysis and/or adjustment of routes, and unjust discipline are management actions that aren't going to go away simply because a contract was negotiated, commitments were made, and the majority of active letter carriers ratified the National Agreement. Policing the contract is an ongoing job, including educating managers so they understand that contract compliance can be accomplished by a successful manager, too. However, when necessary, the reps will pursue grievances to their conclusion, whenever they have to deal with a "my way or the highway" manager.

Sometimes union officers and stewards are faced with individuals who believe the contract is a *union* contract. Check it out. The National Agreement is a set of rules signed on behalf of the Postal Service by the postmaster general and the leader of the letter carriers' collective bargaining agent, the president of the NALC. When Jack Potter and Bill Young put their signatures down and signed "the contract," they committed, on behalf of all of postal management and the entire NALC, to contract compliance. The contract is a *union/management contract*.

What about union organization outside the NALC? During a recent Republican presidential debate, the candidates were asked about unions. One candidate stated,

The real fact is, unions are going to take a more prominent role in the future for one simple reason: A lot of American workers are finding that their wages continue to get strapped lower and lower while CEO salaries are higher and higher. And the reality is that when you have the average CEO salary 500 times the average worker, and you have the hedge fund manager making 2,200 times that of the average worker, you're going to create a level of discontent that's going to create a huge appetite for unions. So unions are the natural result of workers finally saying, "Look, I can't go from a \$70,000-a-year job to a \$15,000-a-year job and feed my family of four."

I hope non-union workers throughout this country were paying attention, not just to the debate, but the economic reality throughout this country. I also hope they look at what this innovative union and its membership did in attaining a contract that is a win-win for both management and labor, and their customers, the American people. It can be done. But it can only be done when you unionize. ☒