



## The never-ending story

**T**hirty-eight years ago, letter carriers and other postal craft employees participated in a strike that led to an enforceable contract with decent wages, benefits and working conditions. Union activists then learned how to enforce their rights through a grievance-arbitration procedure. For many, activism meant filing grievances.

Today, activism is much more multifaceted. Internally, policing the contract and filing grievances, when necessary, continues, with the caveat that today the collective bargaining agreement is much more complicated than it was almost four decades ago. The volumes of pertinent applicable laws and regulations, handbooks and manuals, and enforceable practices would fill most shelves in a small law library, and today's stewards have had to expand their working knowledge of contract enforcement beyond just one book called the National Agreement. Through the years, because of their experience and that of those who came before them, they expanded their knowledge and expertise. *Necessity*.

Today, union activism also means protecting the viability of the Postal Service in the 21st century. In March, hundreds of NALC activists from every corner of the country—Florida to Hawaii, California to Maine, Alaska to Mississippi, our brothers and sisters—walked the halls of the Congress lobbying and educating lawmakers in both parties in a two-pronged effort. First, H.R. 22, if passed along with its companion bill in the Senate, would eliminate the need for the Postal Service to fund retiree benefits beyond the manner that other government agencies have to, saving the Postal Service billions of needed dollars, without harming or diminishing the benefits to future retirees. For an agency that is currently losing millions of dollars each month, H.R. 22 is a fair and healthy start to protecting the existence of the Postal Service. *Necessity*.

**Another message sent to our representatives was that we need to save the middle class.** This country has just experienced a time where the combination of unparalleled greed and deregulation have sent it into an economic tailspin. Leading up to this recession, corporate leaders were reaping huge profits while ignoring the working people

who got them there through sweat, hard work, determination and huge increases in productivity. The same working people, whose real buying power remained stagnant, lost ground to the actual cost of living, while the big cats made out like bandits. Further, when the corporate leaders hadn't made enough money, they replaced American jobs with Third World jobs, using the equivalent of slave labor. It was OK for Americans to lose jobs as long as they could make larger profits. Forget the effect on this country.

The NALC activists who went to Congress understood all of this and that this reality down the road would negatively affect *their* lives. Decent wages, a COLA and defined benefits enjoyed by letter carriers would be in danger if most other working jobs in this country existed without them. The way to turn this calamity around is to build back organized labor in this country through the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). That was the other message these activists gave.

Presently, workers who want to form a union are harassed and intimidated by their bosses. Union organizers are fired and the election to organize is many times stifled. Where the vote to organize is successful, employers often refuse to negotiate a contract, sometimes closing the business and moving. Present law allows that to happen.

If passed, the EFCA allows for organizing into a union with much less possibility of intimidation by the business owners and requires negotiation of a contract or binding interest arbitration over a contract within a short time-span. It strengthens penalties against employers who harass or discriminate against employees who try to organize or attempt to negotiate a contract. It allows employees to have a majority sign-up to form a union or to have a secret ballot election to decide on whether or not to form a union. The employees decide.

Imagine for a minute that you didn't have a union, a COLA, postal life insurance or a health benefit plan mainly funded by your employer. Imagine that your retirement plan is solely funded by you and its worth is dependent on the stock market. Most families in this country don't have to imagine. *EFCA—a necessity*. ☒