

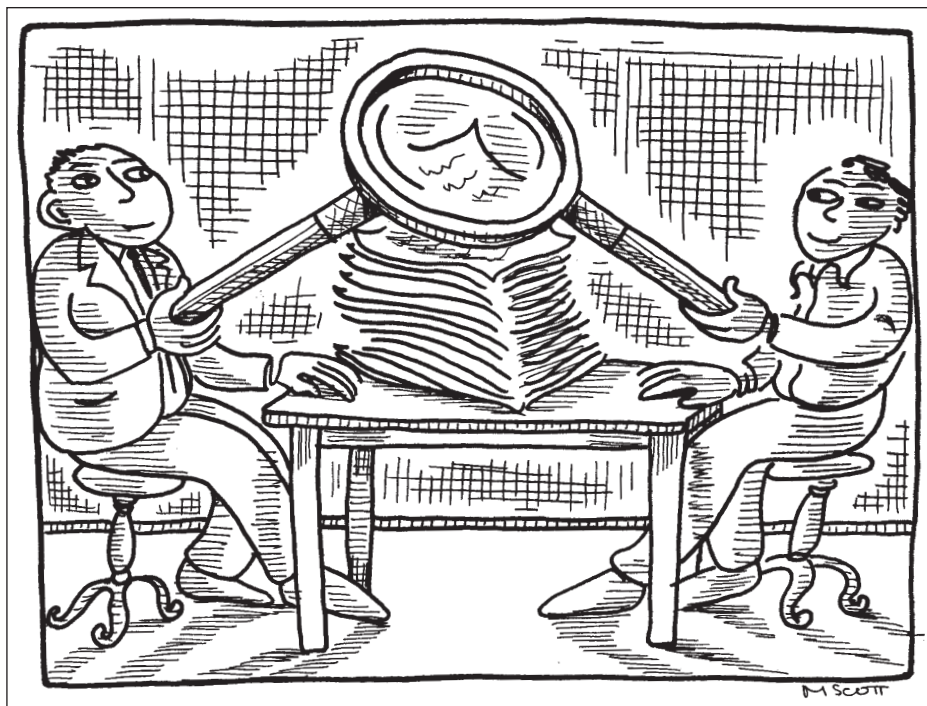
# ACTIVIST

**NALC**

A NEWSLETTER FOR BRANCH LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS  
VOL. 15, NO. 4

FALL 2000

## New dispute resolution process To go nationwide



**N**ALC stewards and local officers all too often know firsthand the pain and frustration that stem from an overloaded grievance/arbitration system. In many parts of the country, the current arbitration backlog means that three or more years might pass before a grievance is resolved at arbitration.

Unfortunately, the system has become overloaded in part because grievances that could and should have been settled at lower steps are passed along to arbitration, with delays and backups occurring at every step of the process.

In 1997, more than 24,000 grievances filed by the NALC were pending arbitration. It was at that point that the NALC and the Postal Service

*continued on page 2*

## PCs: What's in, what's out

**I**n the rapidly evolving world of digital technology, keeping on top of new developments can be a full-time job. Branch leaders who purchased personal computers “way back when”—all of 10 years ago, most likely—may feel overwhelmed by the wealth of possibilities offered in each new computer magazine. How can

you tell if you have the best equipment—hardware and software—to meet branch needs?

Are there efficiencies and savings that you might be missing by not staying on the cutting edge of technology? Or is the whole business of upgrades and add-ons mostly hype, and you’re

*continued on page 11*

### INSIDE

**Compensation ..... 7**

**Communication skills .. 9**

**Media resources ..... 15**

## ADR

*continued from page 1*

agreed to work together to design and test an alternate dispute resolution (ADR) process that would eliminate delays and encourage settlement at the lowest levels, thereby improving relationships between union leaders and management representatives.

The ADR process has been in place at 19 test sites for the past two and one-half years, and in that time the number of grievances has dropped dramatically. Prior to entering the ADR process, a complete pre-arbitra-

**In test sites only  
2,700 out of  
sixteen thousand  
grievances  
were impasse.**

tion review is performed on all cases pending arbitration. This process coupled with the success of resolution in ADR in the test sites has resulted in only 2,700 grievances reaching impasse out of a total of 16,000 cases. With the test judged an unqualified success, the NALC and the Postal Service have agreed to implement the ADR process nationwide, an undertaking estimated to be completed in the next three years.

“We are looking for a solution for every grievance at the lowest possible level,” says Barbara Rogers, a member of Cleveland, Ohio Branch 40 and

the union representative on a Dispute Resolution Team (DRT) at one of the test sites. “The first advantage is the speed of the process, that’s critical. Also, more power stays at local levels, people get more information and are generally better informed about the reasons behind grievance resolutions.”

These are powerful benefits for grievants and local leaders alike, as Rogers and other DRT members agree. This article will detail not only the changes that have been made in the grievance arbitration procedure, but also how those changes have affected local leaders and stewards. As is true for any new effort, changes bring challenges as well as improvements, and DRT members and local leaders will comment as well on the difficulties they have faced.

Branch leaders and stewards will be receiving more information and training from their DRT members and National Business Agents as the process is rolled out nationwide. This article provides a necessarily brief overview of the history, structure, benefits and challenges of the new dispute resolution procedure. Specific questions should be directed to your NBA.

## Evolution of DRTs

In April 1997 national representatives of the NALC and USPS began extensive discussions that focused on three issues: the root causes of workplace disputes; the arbitration backlog; and ways to improve the dispute resolution process. Out of those discussions, an agreement was reached in October 1997 that outlined the steps of a revised dispute resolution process as discussed below. Two months later, the NALC and USPS issued a joint statement of expectations underscoring that the process is new not only in its format but also in

the parties’ commitment to principles of behavior that include:

- Respect for each other’s roles, responsibilities, interests and challenges;

- Establishing and maintaining a more constructive and cooperative working relationship at all levels by promoting integrity, professionalism and fairness;

- Honoring the labor contract and the specific rights and responsibilities of the parties that the contract contains;

- Preventing contract violations through communication, training and good-faith efforts to anticipate workplace problems;

- Resolving disputes in a professional manner and avoiding any unnecessary escalation of disputes.

In April 1998 tests of the new process began at 19 locations across the country.

## How it works

From the beginning, both parties acknowledged that a critical part of the new process would be reliance on

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the *Joint Contract Administration Manual (J-CAM)*. As detailed in a front-page story in the Summer 1998 issue of the *NALC Activist*, the *J-CAM* contains the authoritative interpretations of the National Agreement to which both the NALC and the Postal Service have agreed. Consequently, the *J-CAM* details and clarifies contract language that management has frequently misunderstood and therefore mistakenly applied. The *J-CAM* has been used nationwide to reduce grievances by 40 percent.

A copy of the *J-CAM* must be available in every delivery unit for use by the local steward and manager. Additionally, a copy of the *J-CAM* was mailed to every NALC branch. If additional copies are needed, branch leaders can order the "Contract Materials CD" which contains the *J-CAM* and many other documents from the NALC Supply Department, 100 Indiana Ave., N. W., Washington, DC 20001 (cost of the CD is \$20).

By using the *J-CAM*, parties at the local level should more easily resolve disputes on issues of contract interpretation. That is an important point because the new process also stresses the importance of settlement at the local level. When a NALC steward learns of an issue leading to a dispute, that steward asks the line supervisor to meet for an informal discussion of the issue. In most of the 19 test sites, this meeting is referred to as an "informal Step A discussion." The time limit for requesting the informal discussion is 14 days after the union or the letter carrier first learned or may reasonably have been expected to have learned of its cause. These discussions between NALC stewards and supervisors should lead in many cases to a quick resolution of the problem, as the people on both sides are most familiar with the dispute and its origins, and have copies of the *J-CAM* available to clear up confusion about the meaning of contract language.

At the conclusion of the informal Step A discussion, the steward generally completes Items 1 through 13 of the Joint Step A form; these Items provide basic information including a statement of the issue in dispute. The line supervisor initials the form in space provided in Item 12. If the grievance is resolved or withdrawn, the appropriate box in Item 19 is checked, and the form is then placed in the branch's filing system.

But if the issue in dispute is not resolved or withdrawn, the "Not Resolved" box in Item 19 is checked, and the parties complete the remaining portions of the form. This requires that the steward and the supervisor jointly develop and share information that will help

# USPS

## BY THE NUMBERS

<u>USPS Operations—PFY-2000</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Chg from SPLY*</u>
<b>Total mail volume year-to-date (YTD)</b> (Billions of pieces)	208.4	2.7%
<b>Mail volume by class (YTD in billions)</b>		
<i>First-Class</i>	104.4	1.3%
<i>Priority Mail</i>	1.2	3.1%
<i>Express</i>	0.1	2.9%
<i>Periodicals</i>	10.2	-1.0%
<i>Standard A (bulk mail)</i>	90.5	4.9%
<i>Standard B (parcels/printed material)</i>	1.1	5.6%
<i>International</i>	0.9	-2.4%
<b>Daily DPS letter mail volume on city routes (pieces)</b>	188.0 mil.	16.9%
<i>Percent of total letter mail</i>	72.2%	
<b>Daily delivery points</b>	132.0 mil.	0.7%
<i>Percent city</i>	74.5%	—
<i>Percent rural</i>	25.5%	—
<b>City carrier routes</b>	168,003	-0.1%
<b>Rural carrier routes</b>	66,933	3.8%
<b>Estimated Net Income (\$mil.)</b>	-\$378.0	—
<i>Total Revenue</i>	\$64,564	2.9%
<i>Total Expense</i>	\$64,941	4.0%
<b><u>Employment/Wages—AP13-2000</u></b>		
<b>City carrier employment</b>	241,573	-0.7%
<i>Percent union members</i>	92.1%	—
<i>Percent career employees</i>	99.8%	—
<b>City carrier casual/TE employment</b>		
<i>Casuals</i>	6,806	17.6%
<i>Percent of bargaining unit</i>	2.8%	—
<i>Transitionals</i>	520	-39.7%
<i>Percent of bargaining unit</i>	0.2%	—
<b>City carrier per delivery supervisor</b>	18.0	1.0%
<b>Career USPS employment</b>	787,250	-1.3%
<b>City carrier avg. straight-time wage \$18.24/hour</b>		5.7%
<b>City carrier overtime ratio (OT hrs/total work hours)</b>	13.7%	—
<i>Ratio SPLY</i>	10.6%	—

\*SPLY = Same Period Last Year

This information compiled by the NALC Research Department from USPS Reports.

resolve the issue while also individually investigating and locating information and documentation that clarifies the nature of the dispute.

Once the Joint Step A Grievance Form is completed, the steward sends the form to the postmaster or designee within seven days of the informal Step A meeting with a request for a formal Step A meeting.

The Joint Step A form serves as the basis for the formal Step A meeting between the branch president and the postmaster or their designees. This meeting must be held within seven days of the receipt of the Joint Step A Form by the postmaster or designee.

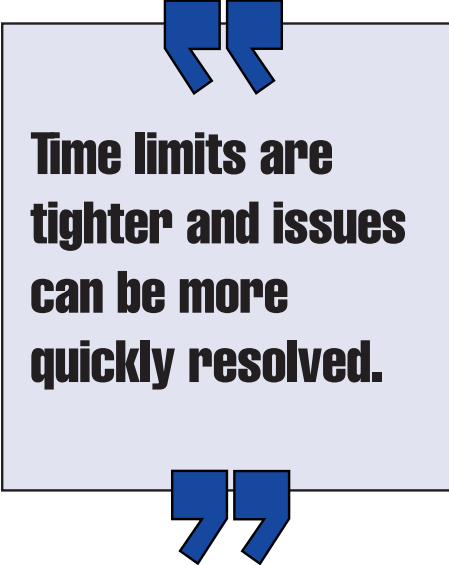
The parties conducting the Step A meeting are expected to adhere to responsibilities that are explained in joint training for both sides. These responsibilities include:

- Interacting in a professional manner, engaging in a constructive dialogue and not creating or participating in an adversarial climate.
- Ensuring that time limits and other procedural requirements have been observed.
- Conducting whatever investigation is necessary to obtain all relevant facts in the grievance.
- Disclosing and exchanging with the other side all relevant facts and documentation.

Step A designees must reach a decision within seven days of their formal meeting. If the dispute is resolved or withdrawn at the Step A meeting, the parties note that fact on the Step A Form and sign and date the form. If the parties are unable to agree at Step A, the branch president and postmaster (or their designees) complete the remaining items on the form, including a statement of the undisputed facts, the union's view of disputed facts and contentions, management's view of disputed facts and contentions and the remedy requested

by the union. All documentation from both parties is attached, and both representatives sign and date the form, noting that the dispute is still unresolved.

The NALC then has seven days to appeal to Step B. At Step B, the dispute is considered by the union and management members of the Dispute Resolution Team who work at the district level. The teams must be certified in the process. This requires both Step B representatives to complete a one-week course at the nation-



**Time limits are tighter and issues can be more quickly resolved.**

al level and successfully pass a written examination. There are no exceptions to this requirement as all parties must be confident that the Step B representatives possess the skills that are required to be successful in their position.

Within 14 days of receiving the appeal, the DRT must meet and make a decision on the dispute. In making its decision, the DRT relies on the completed Step A form and supporting documentation. If necessary the DRT can request additional information from the local level. If the DRT cannot reach a resolution, the dispute is declared an impasse and the NALC

may appeal to arbitration within 14 days of the Step B meeting.

As can be noted from comparison of the current Article 15 procedure with the revised process, time limits are tighter at almost every step. As a result, issues can be more quickly resolved. However, the revised process does allow extension of time limits if both parties agree to the extension.

## How is it working?

On paper, the revised process appears to have all the ingredients for success: reliance on jointly agreed-upon contract interpretations contained in the *J-CAM*; an emphasis on decision-making at the lowest possible level; tighter time limits; the requirement for joint information-sharing that results in both sides laying their cards on the table at the very beginning of the process; and if the local parties fail to agree, the opportunity to turn to the Step B team, trained in the contract and possessing the power to render timely, comprehensive solutions to ongoing problems.

Still, NALC local leaders are all too familiar with programs that look good on paper, but somehow fail to produce promised results. Is the revised dispute resolution process yet another of these efforts? Luckily, there is a way to learn exactly how the process plays out in real life—by looking at the experiences of NALC representatives in those sites where the process has been tested since April 1998.

As noted above, numbers tell one side of the story—only 2,700 of 16,000 grievances in the 19 sites failed to be resolved before arbitration. At the same time, NALC members of DRTs and branch presidents can also testify to the speed, efficiency and fairness of the process as they

have experienced it firsthand.

“We’ve got a process that gives us quick resolution,” says Reading, Pennsylvania Branch 258 president George Cook. “The message has filtered down to line supervisors and managers that they will be held accountable, not years down the line, but in just a matter of days.” As a result, Cook says, NALC stewards are able to settle more grievances at the informal Step A meeting. Although Cook can only guess at the number of grievances resolved at this lowest level, he knows that since the process

**Managers will be held accountable, not years down the line but in a matter of days.**

has been in place, only five percent of his branch’s grievances have actually gone to arbitration.

Another benefit of the revised process, Cook says, is that when issues go to Step B, the DRT not only resolves the matter, but also writes a detailed explanation of how the team reached its decision.

“They explain why,” he says. “When it’s a contract matter, like overtime, they go to the contract and show you exactly what was wrong with management’s action.” At the same time, he notes, the DRT does not hesitate to point out when the union has filed grievances that have

little if any merit. As a result, says Cook, “We’ve got management and our stewards thinking a lot more about what they are going to do—and that’s improved the relationship on both sides.”

Before the revised dispute resolution process, Cook says the branch was “pretty much at war” with management. Now as a result of informal Step A discussions, sharing information at the formal Step A meeting, and detailed information passed down from the DRT, local NALC leaders and USPS managers have developed a better understanding of each other. “We’re working together more,” Cook says, “and we’ve gotten to know one another.”

Cook and other local NALC leaders note that commitment from USPS district managers is essential. “What has to happen is that local managers and supervisors get called on their bad decisions,” says Cleveland, Ohio Branch 40 president Dan Rapp. “If an issue has gone to the DRT, and the team’s decision pinpoints a local supervisor as having made a mistake, then higher management knows exactly what happened.”

As a result, the next time that manager faces a similar situation, the manager may be more willing to abide by the contract or reconsider a discipline decision. In Cleveland, 83 percent of all grievances are resolved at Step B or below, notes NALC DRT member Barbara Rogers.

An ongoing challenge for Rogers and other DRT members is getting parties at the local level to accept more responsibility. “Often when it’s money that’s at stake, such as back pay for a wrongful overtime assignment, management doesn’t want to go on record as authorizing that kind of payment,” she notes.

And at the same time, NALC stewards may be reluctant to agree to any

kind of discipline. She comments, “It’s tough to be the one to say to the grievant, ‘You’ve got to take a letter of warning or a suspension.’” In such cases, grievances are passed on to the DRT, who usually doesn’t have face-to-face contact with the parties involved in the dispute.

NALC DRT member Jamie Lumm, from Portland, Oregon Branch 82, has another perspective. “When the local parties pass an issue on to the DRT, they have to realize that the DRT’s solution may not please either one of them.”

For Lumm, the question is whether stewards and branch officers, instead of resolving matters themselves, “want to give that kind of power to people who don’t know the situation in your particular unit.”

**As a result, managers may be more willing to abide by the contract.**

Although Lumm sees a reduction in settlements at informal Step A—between steward and line supervisor—over the time period in which the alternate dispute resolution process has been in place, he also cites a substantial increase in formal Step A resolutions in that same time period. In his view, this increased willingness to work together at the local level results

from the local parties' reluctance to let an "outsider"—the Step B team—solve their problems. "Just in the past week, I've gotten notice of 30 settlements at Step A," he says, adding that many of those cases might well have gone to arbitration under the standard grievance-arbitration system.

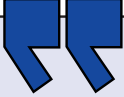
## Faster is better

The speed of resolution, even if the parties go to Step B, is a particular strength of the revised process. "What used to happen was that a manager would violate the contract, then months or even years would pass before the issue could be settled at arbitration," says Kevin Gardner, a member of Bux-Mont Pennsylvania Branch 232 and the NALC DRT member for the Lancaster District. "In that amount of time, the same manager could make the same mistake any number of times—and each time a new grievance would be triggered."


Now managers learn about their mistakes within days and the potential for grievance overload is cut off at the source. In fact, Gardner has noticed a significant drop in the overall number of grievances since the revised process was put in place, coupled with a rise in the number of grievances that go to arbitration. Gardner attributes these changes to the strength of the process. "We've settled all the easy ones," he says. "And at the local level, people pretty much know how to resolve those disputes that come from misunderstanding or misinterpreting the contract."

However, what's left are grievances about contract interpretation issues that are still pending resolution at the national level, he says. "If there's no

agreement nationally, then it's understandable that myself and my management counterpart are not going to be able to agree," he says. "And it's



**Stewards are better informed and help carriers get justice more quickly.**



probably the best thing that those issues go on to arbitration—that's where they belong." Once these issues are decided in arbitration, they are incorporated into the next version of the *JCAM*.

## Everyday life

Finally, how has the revised process affected the day-to-day responsibilities of NALC stewards and branch officers? As George Cook sees it, the average NALC representative is much better off. "There's more accountability, sure," he notes. "But we've always stressed that with our stewards. You need to dig around for all the facts and provide good information to support your case if it goes to a formal Step A meeting and on to Step B. But along with the accountability comes the power of being able to help members get a fast resolution."

In general, Cook notes, dedicated stewards who have received solid training in grievance handling seem to appreciate the genuine benefits of the revised process.

"Stewards are better informed, they see more members getting justice more quickly, and they have a chance to improve working relationships with management," he says. "We see really positive effects and know that we're getting fair treatment."

Overall, NALC representatives who have worked with the ADR process believe that it offers unique strengths and advantages. Quicker resolution of grievances is a big plus, providing both branch leaders and stewards with a sense of better meeting their members' needs. And with a focus on resolution at lower levels, both stewards and branch presidents see themselves as having more authority. They are able to put their in-depth knowledge of situations and players to good use by working to achieve on-the-spot and speedy resolution.

In those cases in which the local parties cannot agree, the DRT is available to offer expertise and contract knowledge in a less threatening, more helpful context. Although some flaws exist, as is true for every system, most local leaders believe that the benefits far outweigh any difficulties in administering the ADR process.

In short, people who have been living with ADR for the past two and one-half years are eager to see this process put in place across the country, believing that a streamlined and more efficient grievance-arbitration process can only help the NALC and the letter carriers it represents. ■

# COMPENSATION

## Help members with schedule awards

**M**ost NALC branch leaders are familiar with the process of helping members obtain compensation for on-the-job injuries or illnesses that result in lost wages. Although intricate and frequently irritating, the steps and procedures required by the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) in such cases are fairly well-known by NALC stewards and branch officers. However, these activists may be less familiar with details and requirements concerning **schedule awards**.

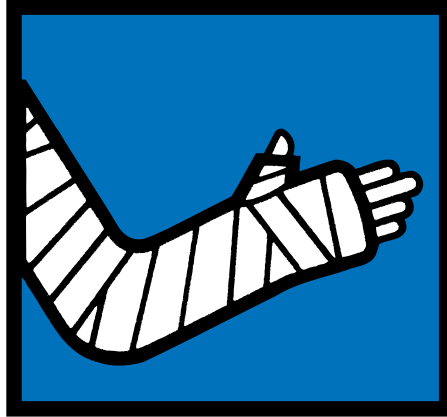
Schedule awards are distinctly different from compensation for lost wages because they are not based on inability to work but are based on the permanent loss or loss of use of certain specified anatomical members, organs or functions of the body—whether or not the loss or loss of use results in inability to work.

Letter carriers who sustain such losses are entitled to receive compensation for a set number of weeks, depending on which anatomical member, organ or function is permanently impaired. The amount, or *schedule*, payable is contained in the Federal Employees' Compensation Act and specifically at 5 USC 8107. (See page 8 for a reproduction of this schedule.)

There are a number of important points to note that distinguish schedule awards from compensation for lost wages. This article will review those points; stewards and branch officers who have questions about a particular case should call their National Business Agents.

### Across the board

The first and perhaps most important difference to note about schedule



awards is that they are paid to eligible letter carriers **regardless of their pay status**. That is, a carrier who meets the requirements for a schedule award can be working or able to work, on sick or annual leave, receiving a civil service annuity or even no longer employed by the federal government. Unlike OWCP compensation for lost wages, schedule awards do not depend on the employee's ability to work. For example, if a carrier somehow loses his or her small toe as part of an on-the-job injury, that carrier may be able to return to full-time employment and have no apparent disability. However, because the toe is gone that employee should receive 16 weeks of compensation, the amount set by the schedule for 100 percent loss of function of a toe.

A second key point is that carriers cannot receive *both* compensation for lost wages and a schedule award covering the same period of time. However, it is frequently the case that a carrier may receive compensation for lost wages for a certain amount of time, and then be eligible for a schedule award. This usually happens when the carrier suffers an injury that has both temporary and permanent effects. For example, a carrier who slips and falls on ice

might break a leg. For the period that the carrier cannot work—perhaps the weeks that the leg is mending—the carrier is eligible for OWCP compensation for lost wages. Then when the break is mended, the carrier's physician determines that as a result of the break, the carrier has lost 20 percent of the full functioning of that leg, and that degree of impairment is permanent. At that point, the carrier becomes eligible for a schedule award for the loss of 20 percent of a leg based on a computation that will be discussed below. Assuming that the carrier has not returned to work, then the carrier's compensation

**Carriers cannot simultaneously receive both compensation for lost wages and a schedule award.**

for lost wages stops because employees cannot receive both types of compensation at the same time.

### Go by the Guides

A schedule award begins on the **date of maximum medical improvement**—usually the date of the medical examination that determines the extent of the permanent impairment.

It is important to note that *the physician making the evaluation must use the medical standards contained in Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment, Fourth Edition*, published by the American Medical Association (usually referred to as the “AMA Guides”). If the medical determination of permanent disability is based on anything other than the *AMA Guides*, OWCP may deny the claim or refer the carrier to a medical specialist that will evaluate the impairment

The basic idea behind schedule awards seems gruesome, but is necessary. Here’s the list of weeks of compensation awarded for total (100 percent) loss or loss of function of an anatomical member, function or organ of the body, as stated in the Federal Employees’ Compensation Act.

Body part	Weeks awarded For 100% loss
Arm .....	312
Leg .....	286
Hand .....	244
Foot .....	205
Eye .....	160
Thumb .....	75
First finger .....	46
Great toe .....	38
Second finger .....	25
Other toe .....	16
Hearing loss, one ear .....	52
Hearing loss, both ears .....	200
Breast (one) .....	52
Kidney (one) .....	156
Lung (one) .....	156
Penis .....	205
Testicle (one) .....	52
Tongue .....	160
Ovary (one) .....	52
Uterus/cervix .....	205

using the *AMA Guides*. Obviously, resolution of the situation would be easier and quicker if injured carriers make sure that their own physicians use the Fourth Edition of the *AMA Guides* in the first place.

### What am I offered?

To determine the exact amount paid for a schedule award, OWCP follows a three-step procedure. First, OWCP establishes the employee’s weekly compensation rate, which is a dollar amount equal to 66 2/3 percent of the employee’s regular weekly pay or 75 percent of regular weekly pay if the employee has one or more dependents.

The second step is to calculate the number of weeks and days of the schedule award, an amount equal to the percent of loss multiplied by the weeks of compensation in the schedule (see below). Finally the weekly compensation rate is multiplied by the number of weeks in the award.

In the example given above in which a carrier lost 20 percent of the use of one leg, assume that the carrier’s regular pay was \$600 a week, and the carrier has two dependents. Therefore, the carrier’s compensation rate would be 75 percent of \$600, or \$450. Since loss of a leg is compensated at 288 weeks for 100 percent loss and the carrier has lost 20 percent functioning, the number of weeks the carrier would receive the schedule award would be 20 percent of 288, or 57.6 weeks. The final step consists of multiplying the number of weeks by the compensation rate of \$450; thereby arriving at a schedule award in the amount of \$25,920. The carrier receives that amount at the rate of \$450 per week for 57.6 weeks, beginning on the date of maximum medical improvement.

### By the way...

There are several other points about schedule awards that stewards should note. First, the schedule or list of body parts for which compensation will be paid does not include the heart, brain or back—portions of the body which are excluded by the Compensation Act as specified at 5 USC 8101 (19). However, if an injury to one of these parts results in permanent loss of use of a body part or function that is contained in the schedule, then a schedule award would be payable. For example, if a carrier’s on-the-job back injury resulted in permanent impairment of a leg, that carrier would receive a schedule award determined by the amount of permanent impairment of the leg.

Schedule awards are also provided for carriers suffering on-the-job injuries that result in serious disfigurement of the face, head or neck. The qualifier here is that such disfigurement is likely to handicap the carrier in securing or maintaining employment. The maximum amount of the award is \$3,500. In cases of such disfigurement, when maximum medical improvement has been reached and plastic surgery has been ruled out or declined, the carrier must visit an OWCP district office for an interview and evaluation by an OWCP medical advisor. OWCP will pay the carrier’s expenses for such a trip.

Given all the “ins and outs” of schedule awards, it is easy to see how carriers, especially those already suffering pain and anxiety from an injury, may become confused about the nature of schedule awards and when they might be eligible for such an award. In these cases, it is important that the NALC steward or local officer be able to

*continued on page 9*

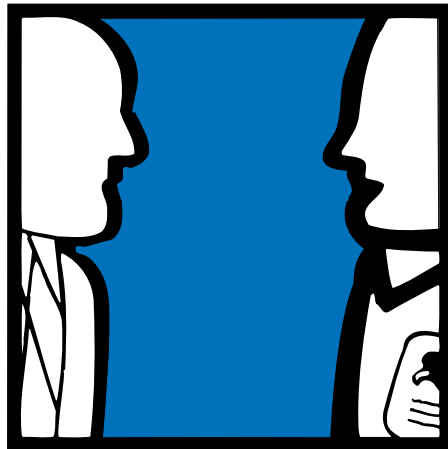


# Communication is a two-way street

*As the alternative dispute resolution process is implemented nationwide (see story beginning on page 1), NALC local leaders may find themselves in situations that require strong communication skills. This article, reprinted from the Fall 1988 NALC Activist, offers useful, general information that can strengthen any communication process.*

**G**ood communication skills are at the heart of all union work. Whether you are handling a grievance, signing up a new member, or running a meeting, you must be able to get your message across clearly and effectively.

Think about your most recent conversation with someone. That seemingly simple discussion was actually a complex process involving at least



two different kinds of communication. First, there was a *sender*—the speaker who formed an idea and chose words to convey that idea. In addition to the words the sender used, his or her message was also communicated by tone of voice, facial

expression and body language.

The *receiver*—the listener—absorbed these elements, adding his or her own interpretation of what the sender really meant. The receiver then evaluated the message and formed ideas and words to convey a response—becoming in turn a sender.

Sender and receiver share the responsibility for effective communication, and both must do their jobs well to make the process work.

## Know your goal

The first step for the sender of any communication, whether written or spoken, is to determine the goal or purpose of that communication.

*continued on page 10*

*continued from page 8*

answer questions or, at a minimum, know where the answers can be found. By reviewing this article, NALC representatives can at least offer some information, including a basic explanation of schedule awards, how these awards differ from compensation for lost wages, when and how a carrier becomes eligible for a schedule award, and approximately how much the schedule award will be, based on the physician's determination of degree of permanent impairment and the carrier's regular pay.

Key points to remember are that carriers can receive schedule awards even if they are no longer employed by the Postal Service—and also if they have returned to work, or are on sick or annual leave. NALC local leaders should also review the

**Carriers can receive schedule awards even if they are no longer employed by the Postal Service.**

actual schedule as printed on page 8 and understand how the award amount is calculated. Finally, it's

important to note that a carrier's physician must use the Fourth Edition of the *AMA Guides* when determining the degree of permanent impairment. If the doctor's decision is not based on this edition of the *AMA Guides*, OWCP will not accept that explanation and may require the carrier to visit another medical specialist.

Remember that carriers who have suffered an on-the-job injury or illness often rely on their local union representatives to guide them through the maze of OWCP regulations. By learning about schedule awards, these representatives can become more effective and powerful advocates for members—a role that benefits not only members with injuries, but all other members of the NALC. ■

Although this advice seems obvious, too often many people speak before they have a clear sense of their purpose, and end up confusing themselves and their receivers.

The goal must be realistic, something that can reasonably be achieved in the time available for your communication. For example, if you are about to talk to long-term non-members, don't set as your goal that you must sign them up on the spot. If someone has deep-seated, long-held beliefs for not joining the union, you won't be able to turn them around in a single conversation. But that one conversation could become the first step toward a friendship, and once you are friends, you may have more success in getting that non-member to join the union.

Deciding which goals are realistic requires a knowledge of the experience and attitudes of your potential receivers. If you hope to convince people of your point of view, you should always know what their opinions are to begin with. If possible, start your discussion at the point where your audience is, acknowledging their opinions and gradually leading them to the conclusion that you want them to reach.

It's important to begin any conversation with statements that the other person can agree with. When people agree with you, they begin to like you. Liking you, they are willing to listen to you. Then later in the conversation, when you begin to present opinions that they might disagree with, they will be more receptive.

## Body language

A final point that senders must consider is nonverbal communication, the ways in which your body language can elaborate, clarify or intensify your verbal presentation.

Receivers of your message are not only hearing your words, they are also influenced by your gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, emphasis and rate of speaking.

For example, if you want to convey a warm message of acceptance to new union members, you should not approach them with your arms folded across your chest and a stern facial expression. Conversely, when you get tough with someone, you should avoid smiling—which is a nervous habit for many people.

## Listening skills

People pay so much attention to nonverbal cues largely because listening to words alone can be boring. People normally speak at the rate of



**Become an active listener, focusing on the message and not getting distracted.**



150 to 200 words a minute, but we can think at a rate three times as fast. And most of us use that extra time to pay attention to things other than the speech—such as the speaker's appearance, gestures and the like.

Being an effective listener means putting your excess mental capacity to good use by thinking about what is being said and not being distracted. You must become an *active* listener—

consciously refusing to drift off into daydreams, focusing instead on the message.

To be an active listener, you must first suspend judgment about what is being said. Frequently people will stop listening if they hear something that they immediately disagree with. If you "turn off" a speaker because of one chance remark, you may miss subsequent convincing arguments.

Active listeners must discipline their minds to focus on what is being said. One way to focus is to reword the speaker's message in your mind. In a one-to-one conversation, you may want to state your version of what is being said to make sure you understand the message, using a phrase like, "What I hear you saying is..." or "Let me see if I understand you; You are saying..."

## Vive la difference

Perhaps the most important part of being an effective communicator is the ability to recognize that differences will always exist between people. We all have different perceptions of the world, perceptions that have been shaped by our varying cultures, experiences and personalities. No one approach will work for everyone, no one argument will convince all people.

By approaching each opportunity for communication with an open mind and a willingness to learn the other's point of view, union leaders have a much greater chance of achieving their communication goals.

This article has discussed sending skills first, then receiving skills—but in practice the process needs to be reversed. To be an effective communicator, you must first be a good listener, able to receive and understand the communications of others. Then, knowing your audience because you have listened to them, you can shape and deliver a convincing message. ■

## PCs

*continued from page 1*

doing fine with what you have?

To answer these questions—and others—we returned to our laypersons' panel of PC users—a small sample of branch leaders across the country who shared their computer solutions with *NALC Activist* readers in the Winter 1998 issue (“Computers: A branch roundtable”). Although the comments of these NALC representatives represent only a tiny and non-scientific survey of branch computer use, their discoveries in the past few years may nevertheless offer some guidance to other NALC leaders facing the same questions.

Issues that concerned this group of NALC local leaders fall into roughly three categories. First, there were questions about hardware: Did their branch have the right machines for

**Evaluate all hardware and software options carefully to get the right equipment for the job.**

the job, that is, were computer memory, speed, and other hardware options best-suited for current and future branch needs? A second issue concerned software: Did their branch have and use the best applications for

the tasks that were handled with PCs, including database functions, financial programs, tools to produce branch newsletters, and the like.

Finally, branch leaders evaluated the usefulness of the Internet and Net-based applications. Did the branch get sufficient value from the Internet to justify the monthly charges assessed for this service?

As this story shows, answers to these questions varied widely, even within this small group. Branch leaders made choices about computer use based on many factors, including the size of the branch; the degree of computer knowledge possessed by branch leaders or available within the branch; budget constraints; and what might be called the familiarity factor—branch leaders' personal experience and level of comfort with computer technology.

“You know, when these things work, they can do marvels,” says Milwaukee, Wisconsin Branch 2 vice president Steve Urseg, who oversees branch computer use. “But there are a lot of traps out there for gullible people. You’ve got to be careful not to be sucked into buying the brightest and shiniest toys just because they’re there.”

### Forever upgrade

Given the rapid pace of change in the computer industry, many branch leaders may be dismayed to discover that what seemed to be the perfect combination of hardware and software touted as top of the line just two years earlier is now hopelessly out of date—at least according to computer mavens both in the industry and within the branch.

“We discovered that the machines we had bought just a few years ago were now a lot slower and more cumbersome than newer models,” says Lenny Larsen, president of

Minneapolis, Minnesota Branch 9. “Given the amount of work we’ve been able to computerize, it makes sense to shop around for faster machines with more memory.” The branch, which has 2,444 members, uses a linked network of PCs in its office to handle branch finances,

**Faster PCs with more memory may be a viable option for many branches.**

including computerized banking, check-writing and payroll. The branch office also maintains a computer database on members that, among other features, can track transfers from one postal facility to another within the branch so branch leaders always know where to find a member on short notice. The branch newsletter editor has mastered computerized page layout and other functions so that the entire newsletter can be placed on one computer disk, which simplifies and speeds the printing process. In addition, computer gurus working in the branch office seem to come up with new uses for the machines almost on a daily basis, Larsen says.

“When we got to the point where so many functions were entrusted to these machines, we started to notice that people were getting frustrated by

slow response times, especially with the financial stuff and the newsletter,” Larsen says. Limited memory on branch computers was also causing problems for officers who wanted to perform multiple functions with the branch’s large data base.

For Larsen and other branch presidents looking to upgrade basic hardware, available options are plentiful. PCs now come with speeds of 1 gigahertz—take our word, that’s very, very fast—and plenty of memory. The price tag is usually less than \$2,000—which is what some branch leaders may have spent 12 years ago for an XT. Remember when they were top of the line? As basic PC

also uses the CD RW to put all page layouts on a single CD. “For our last newsletter, I took two disks to the printer—a CD and a floppy disk with our mailing list—and that was it,” Larsen says.

## Recycling PCs

If the Branch 9 approves more upgrades in the proposed budget, branch leaders plan to set aside one of the “outdated” machines—which are still adequate for many uses, including word processing and reading CDs—for use by stewards and other branch members who need to research the contract or other materials that the national NALC Contract Administration Unit has compiled on CDs. “There are a lot of associate offices and places where NALC reps may not have access to this information easily,” Larsen says. “Those CDs are an invaluable resource and we want to make that technology available to everyone who needs it.”

Hardware decisions for smaller branches may be less challenging simply because the branch may not have a large computer budget. For Rock Island, Illinois Branch 292—with 50 active members—upgrades are possible only every three or four years. “We try to keep up with the general trend,” says branch vice president Fred Carlson. “But we’re obviously not going to stay ahead of the curve.” Currently the branch owns three machines, one for president Richard Nessler and two for each of the branch stewards. Each person keeps the computer at home. “The big thing for us down the road might be going for a network that links all three PCs,” says Carlson. “That could be really useful in terms of sharing information and keeping on top of things.” Such networks, which use the phone lines and require a network adapter in each PC, may be a real

possibility even for a small number of users, according to some computer experts.

Branch leaders who may feel frustrated trying to play catch-up with the evolving computer hardware market might be interested in the solution in place at Bensonville, Illinois Merged Branch 825. “We went through a number of options,” says branch president Jay Ricke. “But we had some bad experiences buying computers, so a few years ago we decided to lease PCs.” Through an arrangement with Gateway, the branch leases seven PCs, of which five are networked. The monthly fee is \$52 for a two-year lease, and at the end of that time the branch can purchase the machine for \$100 and lease the latest model to replace it. “We have it scheduled so that everyone gets a new machine about every 18 months,” Ricke says.

**Branches may want to upgrade and add new features to existing computer systems.**

prices fall, branches wanting to upgrade or add additional features may be able to afford refinements that were out of reach even five years ago. For example, Branch 9 recently invested in a CD read-write drive, and is now using that drive to back up all its files. That process is much faster than tape backup—and the CDs themselves are easier to store and handle. The branch newsletter editor

**Networking PCs in different locations is another possibility.**

“And when we buy the old machines, we try to give them away to people who really need them—like local schools or charities.

## Software solutions

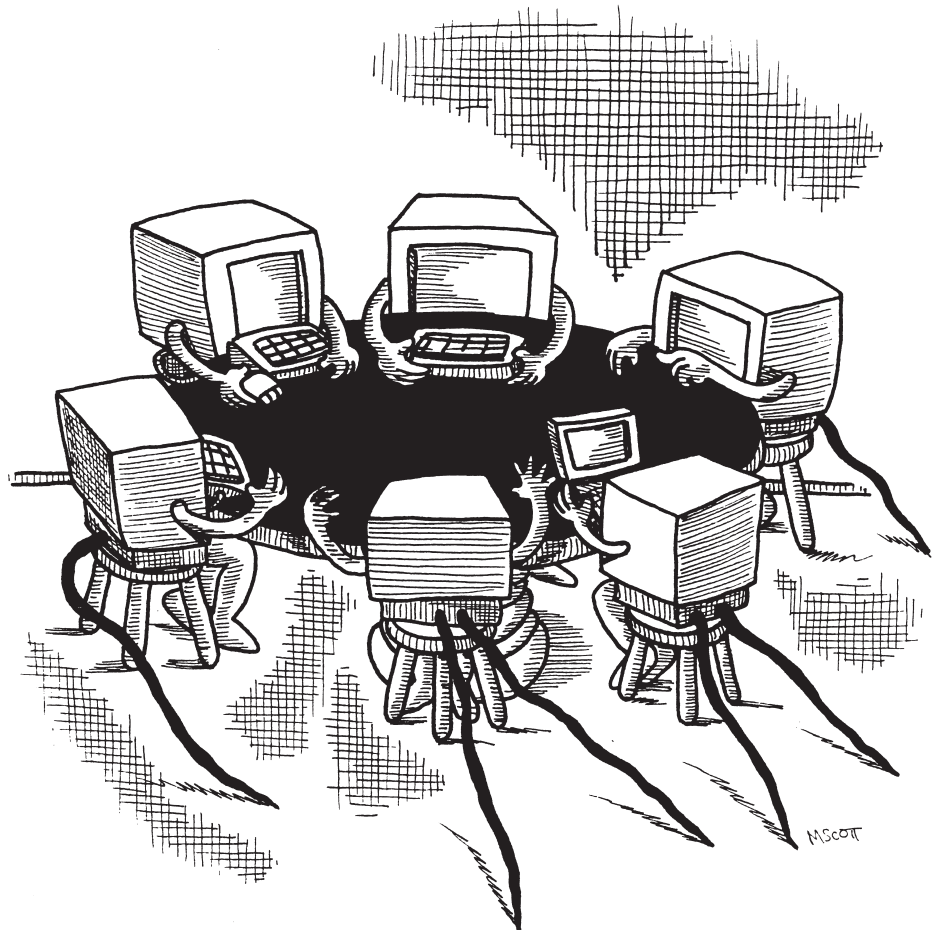
Although hardware decisions might not pose many problems for

today's branch leaders, computer software choices can be more challenging. Most branch leaders look for solid database applications that can perform multiple functions. Although branch leaders can find generic database programs that will work adequately for most branch needs, several branches have developed their own, customized solutions. "We are lucky to have an officer who loves this stuff," says Bensonville's Jay Ricke. "He's come up with a great membership data base that has 30 fields, all connected to each other." As a result, a branch officer need only enter a member's Social Security number to access not only that member's address, phone number, work status and the like, but also all the grievances involving that member, the issues involved and the resolution.

## Grievance access

Branch 825 leaders can also search the database for examples of specific kinds of grievances or grievances concerning specific language in the *National Agreement*. In a true labor of love, branch workers have entered information on all grievances in the branch since 1994—more than 2,500. With this substantial base of knowledge, branch officers and stewards can more easily determine the precise issues at stake in a grievance and the likelihood of achieving a positive resolution.

Powerful, easy-to-use desktop publishing software was cited by several branch leaders as a good investment. "We use the PC for our newsletter, which comes out on an occasional basis," says Rock Island, Illinois Branch 292 vice president Fred Carlson. The process has become a lot easier. The branch uses the same software to make attractive fliers and handouts for members.



"And we can access the newsletter mailing list when we want to send out legislative or political information," Carlson notes.

## Surf's up! Using the Internet

All branch leaders participating in this roundtable agreed that PCs had considerable value for the branch. Although branch leaders—and members—weighed each upgrade and add-on seriously, nearly everyone could agree that branch funds allocated to PC hardware and software was money well spent. But how about the PC's more controversial companion—the Internet? Internet connection fees can take a small but regular bite out of the budget. Did these branch leaders like what they

were paying for?

Opinions on the Internet ranged from indifference to decided enthusiasm. On one side of the scale is Milwaukee Branch 2 president Steve Urseg. "Yes, we have Internet access," he says. "But I don't see what the big deal is. We're running a branch and most of the information we need is available in other forms."

For Fred Carlson, however, the Internet is an invaluable resource. The Rock Island vice president likes to check out a number of favorite Web sites every time he logs on, and enjoys the convenience of downloading documents and forms that the branch uses—such as Labor Department forms that unions must file regularly. "I've been able to research issues in labor law on the Net," Carlson says. "You know the good, reliable sites and

you go to them. Plus it's fun just to see what's out there, what other people are doing."

For larger branches, the Internet can be a convenient way of doing business. Minneapolis Branch 9 president Lenny Larsen always makes flight reservations through airline Web sites. "It's fast and you can do it yourself and pick the best options," he says. He can also shop around for the lowest rates—although he has yet to take advantage of special Web "bots" that users can access to locate the lowest prices for certain items all

across the Internet.

Bensonville president Jay Ricke has noticed that more and more members are taking advantage of Internet connections to send email to the branch. "We seem to be getting five to ten emails from members every day," he says. "I make a point of responding within 24 hours, even if I have to say that I'll have to research the question." For Ricke, this ability to communicate with members seems to keep connections strong and immediate.

At the same time, however, Ricke is wary of depending too heavily on Internet sources for information.

**A lot of information floating around on the Internet is just plain wrong.**

## Investment becomes hazardous waste

**S**o you've decided to upgrade and now you've got an outdated computer on your hands. Can you hand it to the garbage collectors or drop it in the landfill? Unfortunately, no.

Computers and their monitors contain many potentially harmful substances, such as mercury, chromium and up to eight pounds of lead per system. Your state probably has strict regulations about disposal of computers—although most people may not realize that fact. It's estimated that by 2004, there will be 315 million obsolete computers in America—and that's too much for anybody's garbage can.

One option is to donate your old computer. Several organizations coordinate such efforts. Try checking these Web sites: Share the Technology, at [www.Sharetechnology.org](http://www.Sharetechnology.org), or National Cristina Foundation at [www.cristina.org](http://www.cristina.org).

If you can't give it away, you can find out how to dispose of your PC properly by checking with your local government's hazardous waste department—many times these agencies

schedule specific days when people can bring hazardous or potentially hazardous material to a city or county dump. A number of companies are licensed by the Environmental Protection Agency to recycle computers—but you will have to pay for this service. On the Internet, check on Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition at [www.svtc.org](http://www.svtc.org), Back Thru the Future Microcomputers at [www.backthrufuture.com](http://www.backthrufuture.com), and PEP Computer Recycling at [www.Microweb.com/pepsite](http://www.Microweb.com/pepsite), which offers a national directory of recyclers.

And while the topic is recycling, your old cell phone can also be put to good use. Call to Protect ([www.calltoprotect.org](http://www.calltoprotect.org)), organized by the Wireless Foundation, Motorola and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, collects old cell phones and distributes them to battered-women shelters nationwide. Although the phones are not connected to a service, they can be used to dial 911—which may save someone's life someday. ■

"I've seen a lot of bad advice on the Internet," he says. "Many times I'll read things or see people chatting and what they are saying is just plain wrong."

## The bottom line

Given the wide variety of uses that these branch leaders have discovered for PCs, it's no surprise that all these people said the decision to purchase a branch computer was sound. "I can't imagine life without computers now," says Minneapolis Branch 9 president Lenny Larsen. "They've kind of crept into every aspect of what we do as a branch."

Although branch leaders are happy with their PCs, they have adopted a cautious—and wise—policy of thoroughly investigating add-ons and extra features. Closing advice to NALC local leaders about PC purchases seems to boil down to one simple statement: Know exactly what you need, then go get it. And always keep members' needs in mind. If a PC option or feature can ultimately improve life for NALC members, then it is probably a good investment. ■

# Media options that inform, entertain

**S**ometimes it seems like union activists never get to have fun. Certainly NALC stewards and local leaders know all about the pressure and stress that goes with the job. But what about the lighter side of the labor movement? Two recently released catalogs offer a wide range of union-flavored entertainment and education options. First, there's the *Catalog of Music, Art, Books and Video* available from the Labor Heritage Foundation, 1925 K Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006 (phone 202-842-7879 or online at [www.laborheritage.org](http://www.laborheritage.org)).

A second compilation, *Books for Union Leaders, Union Activists, Union Members* is available from Union Communication Services, 165 Conduit Street, Annapolis, MD 21401-2512 (phone 800-321-2545 or online at [www.unionist.com](http://www.unionist.com)). Here are some sample offerings from both catalogs. (The notation "LH" in the item description indicates it can be ordered from the Labor Heritage Foundation; "UCC" items come from the Union Communication Services catalog).

*Canciones por la Causa* (CD, \$20). A newly released collection of farm workers' songs performed by a band headed by the President of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee and his band. Songs are in Spanish and English. **LH.**

*'Til We Outnumber 'Em* (CD, \$17). In the 1930s and 1940s as the appeal of unions spread to thousands of workers in industrial America, Woody Guthrie offered a voice and a perspective that remains powerful today. Guthrie provided a link between dirt farmers in Oklahoma, assembly-line workers in Michigan and artists in

New York City with songs such as "This Land is Your Land," "Talkin' Union," "Pastures of Plenty," and hundreds more. This new collection of his songs features performances by Bruce Springsteen, the Indigo Girls, Tim Robbins, Arlo Guthrie and others. **LH**

*Been a Long Time*, Si Kahn (CD, \$15). A new bluegrass-flavored release from another renowned figure in American labor music. Kahn has donated 100 copies of this CD to be sold to benefit the John Handcox Scholarship Fund of the Labor Heritage Foundation. The Fund helps people of color attend the annual Arts Exchange hosted by the Foundation every spring. **LH**

## Know the enemy

*Field Guide to the Global Economy* by Sarah Anderson and John Cavanagh (paperback book, \$16.95). If you've wondered what the World Bank protests were all about, check out this easy-to-understand book. The authors explain how good-paying jobs in the U.S. become slave-wage jobs in such places as Vietnam, China and Guatemala, and what corporate spokespeople don't tell you about how these changes affect working people everywhere. You might also want to read *The Ultimate Field Guide to the U.S. Economy: A Compact and Irreverent Guide to Economic Life in America* (paperback, \$16.95), which uses cartoons, charts and graphs to explain issues such as government spending and define frequently used (and little-understood) economic terms. **UCC.**

*The Lexicon of Labor: More than*

*500 Key Terms, Biographical Sketches and Historical Insights Concerning Labor in America* by R. Emmet Murray (paperback, \$13.95). If your reading time is limited, this may be the book for you. It contains readable, informative descriptions of key events, people and terms in American labor history, from Mother Jones and the first Labor Day parade to maquiladoras and the 1997 Teamster strike. The author is a veteran labor reporter and union activist; the book also contains 30 photographs and a number of appendices with handy information. **UCC**

*Ravenswood: The Steelworkers' Victory and the Revival of American Labor* by Tom Juravich and Kate Bronfenbrenner (paperback, \$15.95). In the early 1990s, workers at the Ravenswood Aluminum Co. carried on a pitched battle against management by using creative tactics in a strategic contract campaign. The 1,700 members of Steelworkers Local 5668 prevailed against corporate raiders determined to slash costs, marking a significant turning point for American labor. **LH and UCC.**

*The Big One* (video, \$25). Michel Moore, guerrilla filmmaker who leapt into the public's consciousness with his hilarious and heart-wrenching 1989 documentary *Roger and Me*, is still hot on the trail of corporate stuffed shirts and know-nothings in this film made during his 1995 tour to promote his book, *Downsize This!* The causes that Moore champions are worthy, and his attacks are merciless—and hilarious. *Roger and Me* (\$20) is also available. **LH.** Moore's book, *Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American* (paperback, \$12) can be ordered from **UCC.** ■

# Regional Training Seminars

Listed below are regional training and educational seminars scheduled to begin before May 1, 2001.

For more information, contact your national business agent.

## Atlanta Region (Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina)

February 24-25, Georgia State Association State Training Seminar, Atlanta Airport Hilton, Atlanta, GA.

March 3-4, South Carolina State Association State Training Seminar, Holiday Inn, Rock Hill, SC.

March 23-24, North Carolina State Association State Training Seminar, Sheraton Grand, New Bern, NC.

National Business Agent Matthew Rose, (954) 964-2116.

## Dallas Region (New Mexico, Texas)

February 18-19, Region 10 Spring Training Seminar and Rap Session, Hyatt Regency, Houston Intercontinental Airport, Houston, TX.

National Business Agent Gene Goodwin, (972) 594-6252.

## District of Columbia Region (Delaware, District of Columbia,

## Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia)

January 29-30, Maryland/DC Steward Training.

February 4, Delaware Steward Training.

February 8, Virginia New Steward Training.

February 9, Virginia Advanced Steward Training.

April 22-24, Region 13 Regional Officers Training.

National Business Agent Richard Gentry, (757) 431-9053.

## Minneapolis Region (Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin)

March 27, Wisconsin State Association, NE District Meeting, Manitowoc, WI.

March 28, Wisconsin State Association, SE District Meeting, Waukesha, WI.

March 29, Wisconsin State Association, SW District Meeting, Madison, WI.

March 31, Wisconsin State Association, NW District Meeting, Eau Claire, WI.

April 6-8, South Dakota State Association Convention, Ramkota Inn,

Watertown, SD.

April 27-29, North Dakota State Association Convention, Fargo, ND.

April 30-May 4, Region 7 Training Seminar, Holiday Inn Metrodome, Minneapolis, MN.

National Business Agent Barry Weiner, (612) 378-3035.

## Philadelphia Region (Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey)

March 25-27, Regional Rap Session, Tropicana Resort and Casino, Atlantic City, NJ.

National Business Agent Timothy O'Malley, (215) 824-4826.

## St. Louis Region (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska)

February 24-25, Regional Rap Session, Sheraton West Port Hotel, St. Louis, MO.

National Business Agent Joe Miller, (314)872-0227.

## San Francisco Region (California, Guam, Hawaii, Nevada)

April 27, Southern California Regional NBA/CSALC Training, Pasadena Hilton, Pasadena, CA.

National Business Agent Dale Hart, (714) 554-0775.

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