



What have/will you fight for?

The recent release of Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe's "Postal Service Health Benefits and Pension Programs" and "Workforce Optimization" white papers a week before negotiations opened made it clear that letter carriers and other postal employees are in a fight.

The release of these "position papers" had a more shaking effect on me than the subsequent DC earthquake. I started reflecting on the efforts toward benefit gains that had been made in our profession just in my postal career. I wonder if the members and even non-members recognize the effect on their jobs and future if these attacks are allowed to happen.

Have you ever taken the time to consider the benefits and job protections that have been granted to most of us before we even became city letter carriers? Let's look at some of our core benefits and where they came from. The list is in the order of occurrence and, while not all-inclusive, it provides a good picture.

- **1863**—Free city delivery created the first 449 modern-era carriers.
- **1879**—Pay scales established for carriers in large cities, based upon service time (fixed at \$800 and \$1,000 per year). Smaller cities were capped at \$850 regardless of years of service.
- **1983**—Pendleton Act provided permanent status to postal employees. Prior to this, jobs were received and eliminated by the elected party of the day.
- **1884**—City letter carriers started to receive 15 days of vacation per year. Prior to this, carriers worked seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, 10 to 12 hours per day for the fixed pay.
- **1888**—The eight-hour workday became law. (The post office said this meant 56 hours per week.)
- **1889**—The National Association of Letter Carriers is organized.
- **1890**—NALC sued the Post Office Department over the eight-hour day/56-hour week mandate and won an award of \$3.5 million in 1893.
- **1912**—Mann Sunday Closing Act eliminated the seven-day week. Carriers now had one day a week off. They were still working seven days prior to this passage.
- **1916**—First Federal Employee Compensation Act created protecting carriers for the first time should they be injured at work and unable to continue working.
- **1920**—Ten days of sick leave per year granted.
- **1920**—Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and Disability Retirement became law, which guaranteed workers a retirement.
- **1949**—Equalization of all letter carriers into same pay structure regardless of city size. Note that it took 70 years to accomplish this. (See 1879).
- **1960**—Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) created. The NALC had already established its own Health Benefit Plan that year, which continues to be one of the top plans today.
- **1970**—Postal employees strike, which led to the creation of USPS. Strike was over years of pay neglect for postal employees. (Top pay salary was \$8,442.)
- **1971**—First National Agreement provided for a "no-layoff clause."
- **1983**—Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) and Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) founded.
- **2011**—Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe initiates his "white papers" requesting the right to:
 - Lay off workers by breaking agreements in the existing contracts. (See 1971.)
 - Pull the USPS from CSRS and FERS and create a new retirement system more in line with the private sector (less benefits, more contributions from employees). (See 1920.)
 - Pull the USPS from the FEHBP and create a more private sector, less costly health benefit plan for postal employees (fewer coverage higher employee premiums). (See 1960.)
 - Eliminate 120,000 career positions and replace them with a more "flexible workforce" (part-time, low-pay, fewer-benefit workers). (Current salary for CC-1 top pay is \$56,507. See 1970 above.)

From the creation of the modern-day delivery in 1863 until the present, letter carriers have fought to achieve good pay, good benefits and a secure job. We who are the beneficiaries of those fights and actions stand in the crosshairs of an uncaring employer. We can continue to live off the fights of others or we can continue the struggle.

If you do not contribute to the protection of your job through being an e-Activist, volunteering through the Carrier Corps and contributing to COLCPE, then your future is left to someone else. Do you trust them? I do not! 