

Tide may be turning in USPS power struggle



William H. Young

As announced in this issue, NALC and the Postal Service will begin negotiations on August 28 for a new National Agreement to replace the one that expires in November. NALC will do everything in its power to reach a negotiated settlement that is fair to letter carriers, fair to postal customers and fair to the public we serve.

Earlier this year, I began to doubt such a result was possible given the problems we have encountered with postal management in living up to the terms of our existing contract.

Indeed, in last month's column I referred to the decades-long struggle between the Postal Service's Operations management and its Labor Relations management over contract compliance. During my 41-year postal career I have witnessed the ebb and flow of influence on such issues between these types of managers, but with Operations apparently on the rise, the flow had been steadily downhill for many months as far as letter carriers were concerned.

I guess that I should have written something sooner. I am extremely pleased to report that Labor Relations seems to be making a significant comeback. In the June issue, I described five different compliance issues in which Operations appeared to be in the driver's seat. Since that column appeared, the Postal Service has taken significant actions to convince me that Labor Relations is still in the game and may actually be calling the shots on contract issues.

Last month I described the improper creation of Part Time Regular assignments for some business routes in Texas. I have been informed that those business routes have been converted to regular eight-hour assignments, as the National Agreement requires.

I also wrote about three clerks in Puerto Rico who were given seniority dates that violated our contract as part of a grievance settlement. I am pleased to report that management has corrected this mis-

take and has sent us copies of letters sent to the clerks advising them of their new seniority dates. In doing so, management has complied with applicable provisions of our agreement.

Meanwhile, work on the many issues involving the use of DOIS appears to be on a fast track. I had hoped that I would be able to announce significant progress had been made, but that would be premature. Still, I am encouraged that a breakthrough is possible.

The same can be said of our third bundle dispute. We are engaged in constructive dialogue with postal managers. I am convinced that we will either reach an agreement soon or we will agree to arbitrate the issue this year. I am guardedly optimistic that we may be able to resolve this issue without turning it over to a third party.

Dealing with the workroom floor issues that affect our members is one of the most important duties I share with the other officers of this great union. Letter carriers expect us to achieve results, as they should. Beyond enhancing the day-to-day lives of our members, however, resolving workplace conflicts also builds trust and improves the quality of labor relations in general. That, in turn, contributes to better service and operational efficiency and strengthens the job security of our members. The managers in Labor Relations understand this, even if their colleagues in Operations don't always appreciate it.

I look forward to sitting down at the bargaining table with Postmaster General Jack Potter on August 28. It will be months before we know the outcome of those negotiations, but I take heart in the fact that the PMG has served stints as the head of both Labor Relations and Operations at L'Enfant Plaza. For now, he seems to have reconciled the two groups.

It may be too much to hope that the historic struggle between Labor Relations and Operations is over, but I'd settle for a truce long enough for us to complete a successful round of bargaining in the fall. ☒