

## A Fast Track to solidarity



**Fredric V. Rolando**

**S**olidarity is an old-fashioned virtue that is frequently invoked for those of us lucky enough to belong to a union. We know its power firsthand—not just from the livable wages and decent benefits it delivers through collective bargaining, but also from the voice it gives each of us every day on the job.

But solidarity among workers across occupations, industries and borders, nationally and internationally, is both less common and more difficult to achieve. Yet the ongoing campaign against so-called “Fast Track” trade legislation demonstrates that the power of solidarity can propel a national labor movement to protect all working

people, union and non-union alike.

The Fast Track bill, which is formally known as Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), would perpetuate a long history of failed trade policy going back to the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that has produced massive trade deficits and facilitated the continued relocation of millions of jobs to countries with low wages and weak labor rights. If Fast Track were to pass, trade agreements negotiated in secret at the urging of powerful corporate interests would come to Congress for simple up-or-down votes, with no chance to amend them—no matter what provisions are in them.

**As I wrote in this space in the April issue, Fast Track posed a direct threat to letter carriers because trade agreements are no longer just about tariffs and market access. They cover the whole range of economic regulation—and, in our case, how countries regulate their postal markets.**

In both World Trade Organization (WTO) trade talks and in regional trade negotiations with European countries, the European Union was calling on the U.S. to repeal the postal monopoly that makes affordable universal mail service possible in the United States. Such a policy would devastate the Postal Service and threaten our jobs.

By mobilizing to fight TPA, the labor movement has achieved a level of solidarity that I have not witnessed in my adult life. The entire movement—the building trades, private-sector and public-sector unions—has worked closely together with many other civic organizations to fight for a more democratic and just trade policy. We have committed the resources, coordinated our efforts and developed a focused message to translate the public's

overwhelming opposition to “business as usual” trade policy. We even agreed to temporarily suspend making campaign contributions to our friends in Congress until the Fast Track issue was resolved—a move that sent a powerful message to Congress. As the saying goes, money doesn't just talk, it screams.

**NALC can be proud of our contributions to this effort. We committed money to a small but savvy media campaign, released activists to work full time on the “Stop Fast Track” campaign in Washington and California, and our network of hundreds of legislative activists worked with our government affairs staff to contact every member of Congress on this important issue. Our union shined especially bright at two moments during this campaign.**

First, back in February, the union movement met in Atlanta and staged a kickoff rally with former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich to stop Fast Track. AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka urged us to invite our local members to the rally, which we did. As I spoke, I was thrilled that NALC had a huge turnout that night—dozens of letter carriers from Atlanta and the surrounding region came to the rally after work, still in their uniforms, to stand with their brothers and sisters from all walks of life in support of economic fairness and justice. More than one of my colleagues on the AFL-CIO Executive Council pulled me aside to thank me for the solidarity of those carriers who showed up after a long day of work. Of course, the thanks belonged to those amazing carriers, not me.

Second, in early June, the organization WikiLeaks posted on its website secret documents from the ongoing Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) negotiations in the WTO. One was a draft “Annex on Competitive Delivery Services” that was alarming, to say the least. One of the proposed provisions would have required governments to limit the definition of universal service in their postal laws to include only services not provided by “market forces.” The language seemed to suggest that package delivery might not qualify for inclusion in the Postal Service's universal service obligation. If adopted, foreign companies and foreign governments could use such language to attack the Postal Service's role in package delivery. They might even be able to sue the U.S. government in special arbitration panels outside of our court system to force us out of the package-delivery business. In the age of e-commerce, such a result would be devastating for letter carriers—to our jobs and our standard of living.

Our legislative team in Washington reacted quickly to inform Congress of this potential intrusion on its right to regulate postal services in America, and to mobilize our e-Activists. I sent a letter, which was signed by the presidents of three postal unions, to every member of Congress to draw attention to this threat. I believe it has helped to sway several members of Congress to oppose TPA.

After initially losing, proponents are still trying to jam Fast Track through Congress. Win or lose, this campaign proves the value of solidarity. Thanks to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fredric V. Rolando'.