

NALC celebrates 50 years of gratitude for the strikers of 1970



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America's postal service and the jobs of hundreds of thousands of postal workers. These events are designed to express the deep gratitude all letter carriers feel toward the heroes of 1970.

And heroes they were. Imagine the audacity of risking it all and taking on the government of the United States, which not only banned strikes by federal employees but also required them to pledge not to even talk about the right to strike. (Our union also successfully challenged the constitutionality of this "no strike loyalty oath" on First Amendment grounds in 1970, but that's a story for a different day.)

I urge each and every member to learn about the strike by taking in this month's cover story (see page 14), reading our official history (*Carriers in a Common Cause*, which can be found on nalc.org), or watching our previous video on the strike (youtube.com/watch?v=qEW-Te-jKgo). Why? Because the collective-bargaining rights we enjoy today were won by that strike and are directly responsible for vaulting letter carriers and other postal employees from near poverty into the middle class.

Indeed, the settlement negotiated between President Richard Nixon and the NALC (in coalition with six other postal unions and the AFL-CIO) to end the strike actually provided not only immediate wage increases, but also a shift from *collective begging* (lobbying Congress for pay hikes) to *collective bargaining* with binding arbitration to ensure fair results. The strike literally created the modern Postal Service, improving pay, raising the quality of service and limiting partisan politics in the management of the postal system. No longer would

This issue of *The Postal Record* celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Great Postal Strike of 1970. And it's just the beginning. This month, we will hold a very special tribute dinner for the brave members, brothers and sisters all, who risked their jobs and possible legal ramifications to make a stand for fair pay and union rights in the Post Office Department. They did it by going on strike. Then, at the Honolulu convention, we will premiere a new documentary that will highlight how the national strike, which began in New York City and spread across the country, helped transform

postal employees go years without a pay increase due to political gridlock. No longer would local postmasters be chosen by politicians. Because of the strike, letter carriers and other postal workers finally secured a voice at work and the power to contest adverse management decisions.

These victories are not just theoretical or historical. They are current and real in 2020. We are enjoying the fruits of the successful 1970 strike right now in the latest round of collective bargaining. Because letter carriers led hundreds of thousands of postal workers to go on strike in 1970, we don't have to go on strike today to win fair pay and better working conditions. We are now once again using the binding arbitration process won as a result of the wildcat strike of 1970 to secure a new national agreement with the Postal Service.

In February, the NALC and the Postal Service jointly hired arbitrator Dennis Nolan to serve as the chairman of a tripartite arbitration board (with union and management arbitrators filling out the three-member panel) that will rule on our current contractual dispute.

Let us celebrate 50 years of progress.

Last year, when tens of thousands of teachers across West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona showed the courage to stage their wildcat strikes, it reminded me that the spirit of America's letter carriers in 1970 is alive and well today. What was true in 1970 is true in 2020: Workers need unions and a powerful voice in the workplace to make real economic progress. They need collective action and solidarity to achieve a semblance of justice at work.

The current administration has called for taking away our collective-bargaining rights, returning us to collective begging. We will honor the strikers of 1970 as we fight vigorously to preserve the collective-bargaining rights that these amazing men and women fought to secure.

House adopts NALC's top priority

Although we no longer call our lobbying efforts "collective begging," they continue to be important. Congress still decides policy on our pensions and health insurance. On Feb. 5, a bipartisan majority of the House of Representatives supported the USPS Fairness Act, a bill to repeal the disastrous retiree health prefunding mandate of 2006—NALC's top legislative priority this year. Thanks to all the NALC activists who convinced both Democrats and Republicans to support this bill by a vote of 303-106. See the story on page 4.