

What if



**Mack I.
Julion**

In February, an emergency meeting of the NALC Executive Council was called because of some leaked reports that the Trump administration was poised to place the United States Postal Service under the authority of the Department of Commerce. As the council discussed this possible executive order, my mind raced not only about the implications this would have on our union and membership, but also on my family and me. My concern was not as a union representative, but as a letter carrier. Because at the core, that's all I really am: a city letter carrier employed by the United States Postal Service. My "swing" is by Midway Airport in Chicago. I love my job, and I believe in the mission of the company for which I work. What if it was all taken away?

At that moment, I recalled my teenage years when my father's job was eliminated by the abrupt relocation of the Uniroyal plant in Chicago to a more employer-friendly right-to-work *for less* state in the South. He retired much sooner than he had planned. This was shortly after the Professional Air Traffic Control Organization (PATCO) debacle in 1981. PATCO was the union for air traffic controllers who believed that they had a friend in the president at that time, Ronald Reagan. Emboldened by his implied campaign support in 1980, the union went on strike for better wages and working conditions in their contract. This kind of strike against the government is called a "wildcat" strike because it is illegal, just like the Great Postal Strike of 1970.

Unfortunately, PATCO's strike did not succeed as ours had. Reagan ordered the air traffic controllers back to work, and when they refused, he fired more than 11,000 of them and banned them from federal employment for life. This signaled to other employers, in both the public and private sectors, that they need not capitulate to the threats of union demands. These *unionized* federal employees assumed their service to our country was so vital that nothing would happen to them...and it did! Suddenly, they were on the outside looking in. These were real people with career government jobs, families and, of course, bills. Sound familiar?

We now witness similar attacks against the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest public-sector union, representing more than 800,000 federal and District of Columbia employees. AFGE had to lay off half of its staff due to the anti-union actions and executive orders of the administration. Yet many still believe this won't happen to us. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employees, formerly represented by AFGE, are now without a union. Their contract and rights to collective bargaining have been stripped away, as they have been recategorized under the Department of Homeland Security. While we are collectively "fighting like hell," we must also prepare for contingencies, both personally and professionally, and for the what-ifs.

What if we were no longer able to collect dues via automatic deduction? *What if* we could no longer represent our members on the clock via union time? *What if* this new postmaster general—an appointee from FedEx—moves forward with plans to undermine the Postal Service and accelerate privatization? Our success in defeating some attacks on us in that big, ugly bill doesn't mean we are safe. I expect more direct, insidious attacks on the Postal Service and our unions. So, as we look at the what-ifs at Headquarters and plan accordingly, branches and state associations should consider in their budgeting and planning the storms that could present themselves in a very short time. Just like it takes resources to maintain our way of life personally, it also takes resources to represent our members. I don't believe in crying wolf, but we all need to know that the threats against the Postal Service are real.

Congratulations to State President Winston Purchase and the elected officers of the Illinois State Association. It's always good to go home and be around my union family there.

