

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Almost 125 years old, the National Association of Letter Carriers has a long and proud history. This is why, as the 18th president of the union, I feel privileged to offer you this revised and updated history of letter carriers and the NALC—*your* union.

Last revised in 2006 and now in its fifth edition, this history breathes life, sharp and vibrant, into the past. It is a story of letter carriers joining together to fight to protect their jobs, their working conditions, their families—and nationwide delivery service, as important today as it was in 1889, and certainly more threatened now than ever before.

The history of the National Association of Letter Carriers is a story of both continuity and change, of battles fought over and over again when new forces—and most recently, new technologies—emerged requiring new responses and new weapons. This is only fitting, for what letter carriers enjoy today—and what the NALC is today—are both gifts from our brothers and sisters who also worked, dreamed and, in the end, fought for in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families. It is our responsibility to continue the fight and to pass on to future generations not only the union's history, but also the legacy of solidarity and commitment to our brothers and sisters, as well as the union's historic dedication to preserving and strengthening the nation's postal service.

So there is much to tell and much to learn—of people and places, of good times and lean, of struggles and victories. And as you read these pages, remember, this is *your* history—to learn from, to preserve and, most of all, to pass on to the next generation of members of the National Association of Letter Carriers.



In Solidarity,

Fredric V. Rolando
President
National Association of Letter Carriers

July 2014

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TIMELINE OF NALC HISTORY



First letter carriers appointed by Congress

Eight-hour day law for carriers, championed by Congressman "Sunset Cox, enacted

Carriers from large cities and NALC hold consolidation meeting in New York City; first NALC Convention held in Boston, Massachusetts

Mutual Benefit Association established at NALC Convention in Detroit

Lloyd-LaFollette Act rescinds Gag rules, and gives postal and federal workers right to organize

Postmaster General Will B. Hays announces "humanization" policy and officially recognizes postal organizations

NALC Health Benefit Plan began operation

1889: 96 members

1910: 27,000 members

1930: 58,000 members

1950: 103,000 members

1794

1863

1888

1889

1890

1893

1894

1905

1912

1917

1921

1939

1960



Free city delivery instituted in large cities



NALC founded in Milwaukee

Supreme Court upholds NALC interpretation of Eight Hour Law in two decisions; carriers eventually awarded \$3.5 million in overtime claims

National Ladies Auxiliary founded at NALC Convention in Portland, Oregon



NALC affiliates with American Federation of Labor; women hired as temporary letter carriers as men went to war

Golden Jubilee Convention marks NALC's first 50 years—gold card for 50-year members established





NALCREST retirement community for letter carriers dedicated



Membership gains power to elect national officers directly

Arbitration panel determines terms of a National Agreement for the first time

NALC, USPS and other organizations sign Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace

Arbitrators elevate letter carriers to Grade 6, breaking historic link with postal clerks

Restrictions on subcontracting letter carrier work contained in new National Agreement

1970: 212,000 members

1989: 316,000 members

2014: 289,000 members

1962 1964 1970 1972 1982 1984 1989 1992 1993 1999 2006 2007 2013

Executive Order 10988 issued; NALC wins right to represent city delivery carriers in nationwide representation elections

National wildcat strike; Postal Reorganization Act passed



Union celebrates its 100th anniversary in Milwaukee where it was founded

Hatch Act Reform expands political rights for carriers, other postal and federal employees.

Postal Accountability and Enforcement Act signed into law

Arbitration panel resolves 2011-2016 contract, creating city carrier assistant position with a path to a career position

Fair Labor Standards Act litigation settled; Joint NALC-USPS Employee Involvement Process established



INTRODUCTION

Although the first federal workers to organize were the skilled craftsmen working in Navy shipyards and in the U.S. Government Printing Office, postal workers were the first federal employees to join unions in great numbers, with letter carriers the first craft to form its own union—the National Association of Letter Carriers. The struggle to form unions of their choosing followed a different path for letter carriers and others who toiled for the federal government than that taken by workers in American industry.

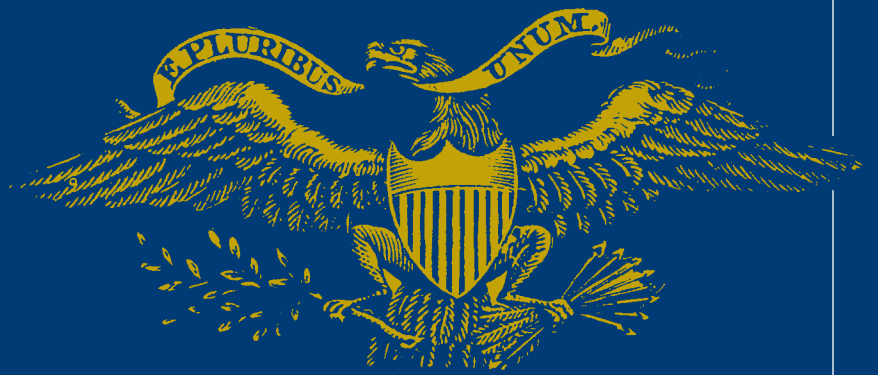
From the very beginning, letter carriers and the NALC have, out of necessity, faced off against a special employer, the United States government. Because government employees work for the public, many Americans have believed that government workers owe their employer—ultimately the American people—a degree of loyalty and obedience far beyond that owed by other workers. As a result, letter carriers have sometimes been reluctant to antagonize both the public and the government by engaging in what might be viewed as extreme or radical collective action.

Recognizing the public's views, the NALC has constantly had to juggle its members' aspirations against the forces of public opinion and governmental reaction. Prior to 1971, conditions of work had been fixed by law rather than by direct negotiations between the union and the then Post Office Department, and the NALC relied exclusively on finely honed weapons of lobbying and political action to become one of the powerful federal unions. But as a direct result of the illegal but unquestionably necessary and justifiable 1970 strike, collective bargaining has given the union and its members a "second front" in the age-old struggle to improve letter carrier wages, benefits and working conditions.

Whether lobbying Congress, reaching out to the public, or negotiating with postal management, the NALC has always exhibited unity of goals and methods, thus generally avoiding the factional struggles that often divide organizations. In part, this remarkable cohesiveness has been due to the nature of the letter carrier's job: all workers have labored in the same craft and performed the same work. But what also contributed mightily to this unity and solidarity from the very beginning was that letter carriers, unlike other workers of the late 19th century, shared a common employer, the Post Office Department, although delivering the mail in communities scattered across the United States. In contrast, when the NALC was founded, industry was barely national in scope, and since most workers organized locally to fight localized struggles, many national unions were national in name only.

Of course, letter carriers' true employer has always been the American people, which is why they have shouldered their satchels with such pride. One of the NALC's early presidents, James C. Keller, expressed this sentiment at the beginning of the 20th century: "We hold that he [the letter carrier] is not a messenger boy, but that he is an intelligent part and parcel of the social and industrial organization of this land of ours."

Such pride, however, did not change the harsh realities of letter carriers' lives for, like other workers, letter carriers worked long and hard to pay the rent and put food on the table—selling their labor to survive. And like other workers, they organized because of economic necessity and the injustices on the job. Like other labor unions, the NALC is rooted in the workplace. The pages that follow tell the history of letter carriers who worked to live—and of unionists who lived for their common ideals.



1775-1862

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE REPUBLIC

*Let us bind these people together to us
with a chain that can never be broken.*

GEORGE WASHINGTON

When George Washington, our country's first president, spoke these words in 1782, he and other prominent figures of the time were seriously concerned about the fate of this fledgling nation. Many Americans worried that a democratic republic composed of thirteen states and a vast frontier covering over a million square miles would never survive: the United States was geographically too vast to govern; the customs, opinions and laws of each state were too different; and each state jealously guarded its rights and powers.

As Washington's remark suggests, he was acutely aware of America's precarious situation and saw the development of a national postal service as a way to bind Americans together into a unified nation. A nationwide postal system had existed since 1775—when the Second Continental Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin the first postmaster general—but by 1782, the operation of the post office provided little comfort to those Americans worried about their country's future. Stagecoaches and postriders were too unreliable, theft common, and postage rates too high. Postal legislation passed that year had given the central government control of both interstate and intrastate posts, but many citizens ignored the law. In fact, many Americans questioned the extent of the central government's postal power.



Benjamin Franklin immortalized in his role as the nation's first Postmaster General



But by 1794, Washington's wish was a reality. The Constitution of 1787 had granted Congress specific power "To establish Post Offices and Post Roads," and this authority was defined in 1792 when Congress approved comprehensive postal legislation. Two years later, in 1794, it officially established the Post Office as a permanent part of the federal government and authorized the appointment of this country's first letter carriers.

In these early days of the Republic, America's first letter carriers received no salaries but were permitted by Congress to collect a fee of two cents for every letter they delivered. Although two cents was a considerable amount of money in those days, this fee did not guarantee letter carriers a decent living wage. Since the recipients of letters had the option of accepting delivery service or calling at the post office to pick up their mail, most citizens chose the latter. Delivery of one's mail was a luxury few people could afford. Thus, the wages of these pioneer letter carriers were erratic at best.

THE SPOILS SYSTEM

To make matters worse, by the 1830s whatever job security letter carriers might have enjoyed was lost as favoritism and partisanship began to dominate their lives.

This started when Andrew Jackson succeeded John Quincy Adams as president after the bitter election campaign of 1828. Once in office, Jackson found himself surrounded by his enemies—men Adams appointed and who had actively and often viciously campaigned against him. Jackson's response to this situation was ruthless. He flagrantly replaced everybody—no matter how qualified—with loyal members of his own political party. "To the victor belong the spoils" became the rallying cry of his administration, and the spoils system—rewarding the party faithful with political appointments—quickly became entrenched in the federal government. In particular, it pervaded the Post Office Department,



America's first letter carriers received no salaries but were permitted by Congress to collect a fee of two cents for every letter they delivered.



rippling downwards from the postmaster general to individual postmasters and then to postal clerks and letter carriers.

Local post offices intertwined with the local political machines of the national party in power. Letter carriers and post office clerks acquired their jobs through partisan ties and lost them whenever there was a local or national change in party or even in faction. So no matter how hard a letter carrier worked or how desperately a letter carrier needed the job, a change of administration meant he was out on the streets—not delivering the mail but looking for another way to make a living. In addition, for as long as the carrier held the job, he was expected to be a campaign worker first, a letter carrier second. If he failed to live up to this expectation, his work load might be increased, his pay reduced, or he would be fired.

The spoils system—capricious and arbitrary at best—fostered a kind of passivity among letter carriers. Hired only for political reasons and with the knowledge that the job was temporary, letter

carriers generally were inclined to accept inadequate wages and poor working conditions, both of which were determined by local postmasters. An individual letter carrier could improve his own situation by becoming friendly with the postmaster, but there was little hope of carriers as a whole wresting control over their work-lives. This situation, however, was to change within a short period of time.

Frederick W. Wolf was appointed a letter carrier in Troy, New York in 1854 and served for 54 years. At the time of his appointment, carriers collected two cents for each letter they delivered. Since it was not always convenient to collect on delivery, Wolf would often mark the amount due on the door or side of the house. A large number of these houses were destroyed in the fire of 1862 and since Wolf had no other record of the money owed him, he never recovered his money.





1863-1888

THE MODERN ERA BEGINS

The inauguration of free city delivery in 1863 marks the real beginning of the history of the modern letter carrier and it indirectly marks the beginning of the history of the NALC.

Free city delivery was a product of the Civil War: One bitter winter day in Cleveland, Ohio, a long line of citizens was anxiously waiting at the post office to see if there were any letters from husbands, relatives or friends fighting in the war. The assistant postmaster and window clerk, J. W. Briggs, was appalled at this sight. He felt the government should accommodate its citizens better than he could on that cold day in Cleveland. So Briggs canvassed neighborhood groceries to find out if mail could be brought to these stores, sorted by post office personnel and then delivered to the front doorsteps of patrons. Once he got the storekeepers' approval, Briggs marked out the first routes and delivered the mail himself. The Cleveland experiment was an instantaneous success, and shortly thereafter Congress passed legislation establishing free city delivery in every city with more than 50,000 people.

A moment to be remembered: On July 1, 1863—the day the savage battle of Gettysburg began—449 modern letter carriers began to walk the streets of 49 cities. One hundred and thirty-seven letter carriers delivered mail to the doors of patrons in New York City; three letter carriers delivered mail in Louisville, Kentucky; one letter carrier walked his route for the first time in Nashua, New Hampshire. The history of the modern letter carrier had begun.

Be it known by these presents that Timothy Mahony is constituted and appointed a Letter Carrier to deliver letters and other mail matter in the City of San Francisco from my Office, and is entitled to receive therefor the fees authorized by Law, to wit: five cents for each letter and two cents for each newspaper or circular.

Witness my hand this 1st day of September 1859.

W. S. Keller
Postmaster



Joseph W. Briggs

National Postal Museum Library

KEEP AT IT

Almost immediately, local associations of letter carriers began to spring up in cities across the country. A New York letter carrier association was founded in 1863 and a Chicago association in 1870. Originally organized as mutual benefit societies and social clubs, these early letter carrier associations quickly expanded their roles. They began to seek improvements in working conditions by enlisting the aid of local politicians. For those problems that could not be resolved locally, letter carrier associations would elect or appoint delegates and send them to Washington, DC to lobby their senators and representatives.

Although these early efforts to effect change were isolated and localized, they demonstrated letter carriers' determination to improve their working conditions. But carriers were bucking a spoils system that was so deeply ingrained in the service that real change was impossible. Furthermore, as the history of working people reveals, isolated and local efforts rarely move mountains. A national organization representing all letter carriers was needed, but the spoils system stood in the way.



National Postal Museum Library

When your load is getting heavy
And the miles are "cussed" long,
When your patrons start a-crabbing
And the world is going wrong.
Just pucker up your whistle
In some half-forgotten song,
And keep at it!

When the catalogs are piling up
And loads of circulars come in,
When you're plowing through
the snowdrifts—
Maybe wet through to the skin—
Just try and pull your mouth
Into the semblance of a grin,
And keep at it!

If you're tired and discouraged
And you think, "I'll jack it up—
This is not the job for me:
I have drained life's bitter cup."
Say! Some other jobs are harder
Than the postman's—don't give up!
And keep at it!

"Lucy"
Derry, New Hampshire

First letter carriers of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Post Office, 1879.



AN OBSTACLE REMOVED

A serious movement to reform the spoils system did not develop until after the Civil War. It gathered strength during the 1870s and ironically benefitted from the shooting of President James Garfield on July 2, 1881, by what history books have long described as a “disappointed office seeker”—Charles J. Guiteau. Immediately, reformers argued that Garfield was a victim of the spoils system: If there had been a proper civil service system, there might not have been a “disappointed office seeker” turned assassin. Garfield’s death on September 19 elicited an intense response from the public, which prodded the Congress into action.

This country’s first civil service law, known as the Pendleton Act, was passed by Congress in 1883, two years after Garfield’s death. Among other provisions, it specifically required letter carriers and post office clerks in every post office with 50 or more employees to take competitive exams to qualify for their jobs. It also included language which made their positions permanent. Although the law excluded all postmasters and employees in the smaller post offices, approximately half the postal workforce was covered. So for the first time since Andrew Jackson’s administration, letter carriers were hired because they were qualified for their jobs—not because they were members of a certain political party. Furthermore, these same carriers could not legally be fired

for political reasons. As a result of these reforms, the high turnover among letter carriers began to diminish, and a permanent core of carriers with a stake in the service developed.

The passage of the Pendleton Act had another effect on letter carriers—less obvious, but just as important. The relationship between Congress and letter carriers began to change. If letter carriers could no longer be counted on to represent the political interests of senators and representatives at home, why should the Congress do anything for them? Congress' interest in the welfare of letter carriers quickly faded, and carriers found it necessary to unite to protect their interests. And now that letter carriers were no longer dependent upon local and national politicians for their jobs, their loyalties shifted from the party and postmaster to each other. The beginning of the end of the spoils system fostered a community of interests among letter carriers which had never existed before. The stage was set for organization.

LITMUS TEST FOR THE FUTURE

Almost immediately after the Pendleton Act went into effect in 1883, letter carriers in the New York area banded together to obtain an annual vacation law.

Officially, letter carriers were not allowed vacations. They were supposed to work 365 days per year, including Sundays. The postmaster in New York City, however, permitted his carriers to take ten days of vacation per year, providing their fellow workers agreed to cover the routes of those on vacation. At the same time, federal employees in Washington, DC, including those working in the headquarters of the Post Office Department, were allowed 30 vacation days per year, a privilege not extended to the employees of the Washington, DC post office.

THE POSTAL RECORD

The *Postal Record*, NALC's official monthly journal, is slightly older than the union itself. First



John F. Victory

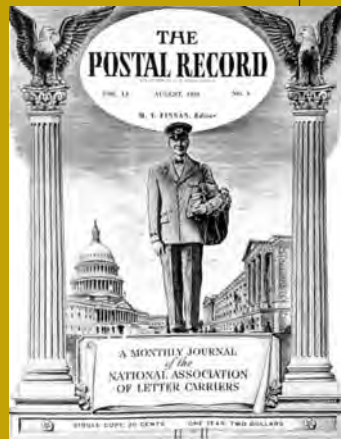
published in 1887 as a private enterprise by Alvin G. Brown of Massachusetts, the *Record* was devoted chiefly to the concerns of letter carriers, but also carried material of interest to all postal workers.

John F. Victory, a letter carrier elected NALC national secretary at the 1890 convention, purchased *The Postal Record* from Brown in 1891. A talented writer, Victory edited the magazine and built up its subscribership during his term of office. The NALC bought *The Postal Record* from Victory on December 1, 1893, acting on a resolution of the Kansas City, Missouri convention that year.

"Raffles" was the name given by irreverent NALC members to the drawing of the rakish-looking postman (above right) which appeared on every cover of *The Postal Record* for 31 years. Then, in August 1938, Editor Michael T. Finnan came out with a new cover. It was still the same blue-gray color but "Raffles" was replaced by a drawing of a vigorous-looking modern carrier. "Son of Raffles" only lasted 41 consecutive issues, replaced by photographs starting in January 1942.



This "modernization" of *The Postal Record* cover occurred only months before the union, in keeping with a resolution passed by the Los Angeles Convention of 1941, began mailing the magazine to every member's residence instead of delivering it in "club bundles" to union halls and post office workrooms for members to retrieve.



Today, copies of the magazine also land on the desks of important decision-makers in Washington, D.C. and throughout the international labor movement. In a concession to the realities of the internet age, selected features and columns are also posted on the union's website.

Frustrated with the discrepancy in treatment and newly blessed with the protections the Pendleton Act had provided them, Washington letter carriers petitioned the Department for the same leave privileges as other federal workers in the city.

Petitioning the Department was unprecedented in the history of the service, and it did not react favorably to this aggressive behavior. The Department's law officer issued a statement declaring that no law existed under which letter carriers could be allowed any vacation days whatsoever. The postmaster at the New York Post Office was soon ordered to cease giving carriers annual leave.

The New York City letter carriers did not passively accept this Departmental dictate, but rather decided to agitate for an annual vaca-

tion law. Together with letter carriers from several other cities, they approached Congressman Samuel "Sunset" Cox, and in 1884, after a monumental effort, Cox was able to persuade Congress to pass legislation giving all letter carriers—not just those in New York City or Washington—a 15-day vacation, with pay, every year. A surprising victory, it gave letter carriers first-hand experience in the advantages of organized agitation. Letter carriers throughout the nation were vividly reminded that in unity there is, indeed, strength.

A word about "Sunset" Cox. He was the one great exception to congressional apathy, working long and hard to improve the conditions of letter carriers. A Democrat, a former congressman from Ohio, and a two-term congressman from New York, he took up the cause of the letter carrier within the halls of Congress. It was Cox who



Samuel S. Cox



CARRIER EXAM, LATE 1800S

Sample Questions from the Qualifying Examination for Letter Carriers

Arithmetic

Question 1: A carrier makes 4 trips a day, carrying 64 letters and 32 papers each trip. The letters average in weight $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. each and the papers 2 oz. each. How many pounds of mail does he deliver in a day? (16 oz. to the pound.)

Question 2: In an office employing 35 carriers, each carrier loses 20 minutes a day in idle talk. Suppose the average salary of each to be \$2.50 for ten hours work, what is the cost to the Government of the lost time each day, and what will it amount to in a year of 313 working days?

Local Delivery

Question 1: Name the principal railroads (not exceeding five) which pass through or terminate in this city, and give the location (the street or streets on which situated) of the principal depot or ticket office of each.

Question 2: Name four streets which pass nearest to the building in which this examination is held, and mention one public building or prominent business house on each.

Question 3: Name the principal hotels in this city (not exceeding five) and the location (street or streets on which situated) of each.



USPS Library

was responsible for persuading Congress in 1879 to establish a regular pay scale for letter carriers. Up until this time, letter carrier pay was set by each postmaster, and glaring inequalities extended from city to city. The 1879 law created two grades of carriers in the larger post offices, with salaries fixed at \$800 and \$1,000 a year. In the smaller post offices, where letter carriers' jobs were still subject to the spoils system, Congress limited carriers' wages to \$850 per year, regardless of years of service.

CARRIERS AND THE 8-HOUR DAY

The struggle for an eight-hour day is a landmark in letter carrier history. It was also an intense nationwide movement, one involving an enormous number of workers in addition to letter carriers.

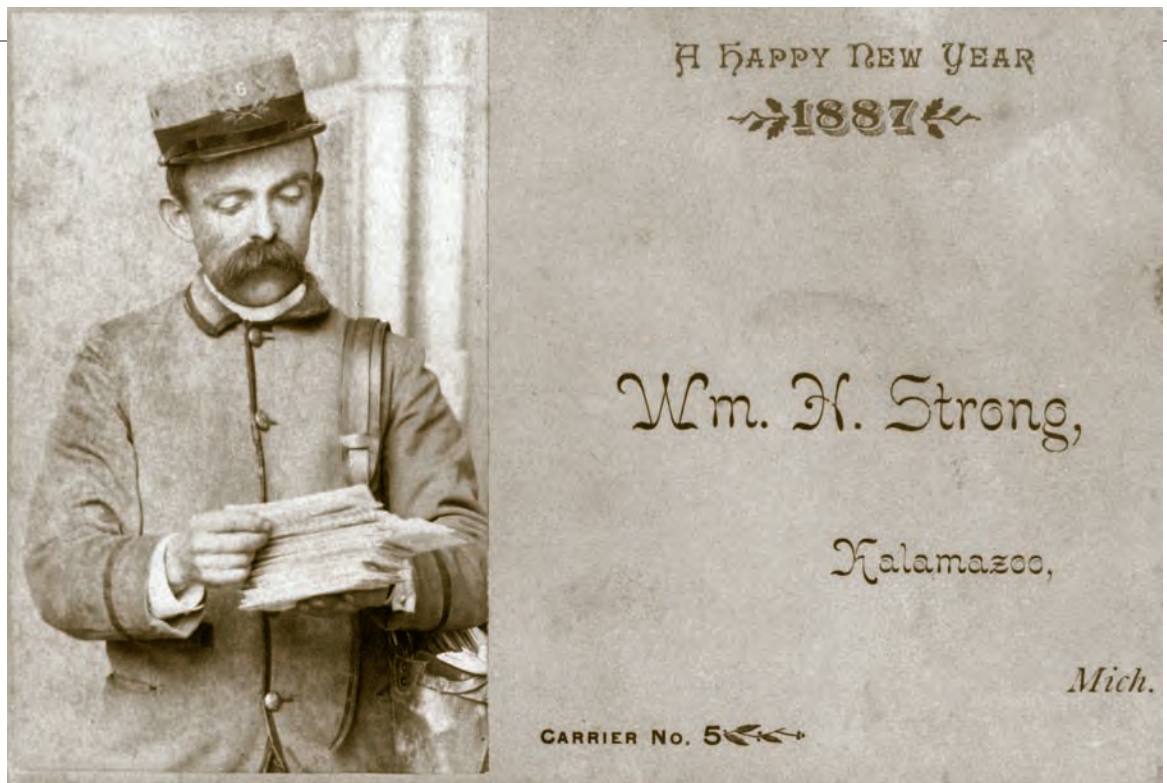
The movement began soon after the Civil War. The nation was industrializing, the economy was expanding and labor was beginning to realize its potential strength. The Depression of 1873-79 interrupted the campaign, but by the early 1880s, the move-

ment for an eight-hour day began to revive.

Letter carriers' involvement began as early as 1868 when Congress passed an eight-hour law for federal "laborers, workmen and mechanics." The Post Office Department, arguing that its employees did not fit the description, refused to comply. Frustrated in their attempts to force the Department to reverse itself, angry letter carriers in a number of large cities—New York, Chicago, Omaha, Buffalo, Brooklyn—turned for help in the 1880s to the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor, the leading labor organization of the time. Letter carriers formed local Knights of Labor assemblies and many became leaders within the organization.

By the mid-1880s, the Knights were at the peak of their power. By 1886, more than 700,000 workers had joined this newly militant organization. The entire nation was up in arms over the eight-hour day. Workers were striking and protesting. Employers were fighting back with a vengeance, intent upon smashing both the Knights and the movement.

Like private employers, postal management also vigorously opposed the move-



USPS Library

“Eight hours of work per day” was the issue around which many carriers organized into a body of workers fighting for a common goal.

ment. And when an eight-hour bill for letter carriers, drafted by the Knights of Labor, was introduced in Congress in 1886, the Department harassed any and all active supporters. Some carriers who

led the campaign were fired for minor infractions of work rules. Others were either transferred to less desirable routes, assigned routes far from their homes, given extra duties or ordered to take vacations with no advance warning. In New York City, 150 letter carriers were suspended when the postmaster discovered they were members of the Knights. They were later reinstated, but only after the national office of the Knights of Labor interceded on their behalf.

Confronted with the aggressive opposition of the business community, the movement for an eight-hour day lost steam and finally dissipated. However, amidst the ruins of this major defeat for labor, one group of workers—the nation’s letter carriers—used the influence of their local associations to achieve success. With the help of their congressional champion,

“Sunset” Cox, supported by the lobbying of local letter carrier associations, particularly those in New York and Philadelphia, Congress overrode the Department’s strong opposition and passed the Knights’ eight-hour bill for carriers in 1888. This victory was jubilantly celebrated on July 4 of that year by a massive parade of letter carriers from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC through the streets of New York City.

For letter carriers, who at that time were working at least 10 to 12 hours a day, seven days a week, the enactment of the eight-hour bill was an impressive and long overdue victory. But perhaps more important than the passage of the law were the forces released by the intense ferment of the eight-hour day movement itself. Now letter carriers began to see themselves—and each other—differently. “Eight hours of work per day” was the issue around which many letter carriers organized themselves into a body of workers—workers fighting for a common goal. Letter carriers were now ready to organize a union.



1889-1901

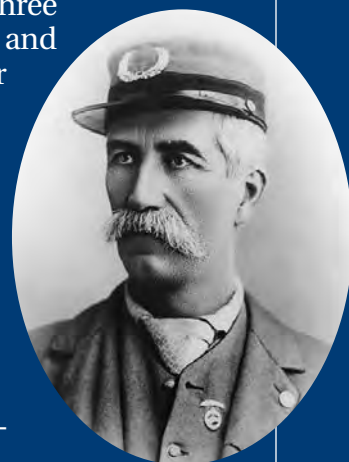
THE NALC IS BORN

Letter carriers had tried to organize a national union at least three times—in 1870 in Washington, DC, in 1877 in New York City, and in 1880 again in New York City. Recognizing that these earlier attempts had failed in part due to the expense of regularly convening enough carriers to sustain a national organization, in 1889 the Milwaukee Letter Carriers Association decided to time their call for another national meeting of carriers to coincide with the annual reunion of the Grand Army of the Republic—an organization of Union Army veterans—so that letter carriers who were veterans could take advantage of reduced train fares.

In issuing the invitation sent to every city delivery post office in the United States, the Milwaukee carriers advised delegates without regulation postal uniforms “to bring a letter of introduction from the postmaster or superintendent” and to bring “credentials from superior officers.” The Milwaukee carriers also set forth a partial agenda for the meeting:

1. The formation of a national organization.
2. Petitioning Congress for an increase of carriers’ salary.
3. Organizing a U.S. Letter Carriers’ Mutual Ins. Co.
4. The pensioning of carriers after continued service of [number to be debated] years.
5. Providing substitute carriers with a fixed salary during their period of probation.”

Ironically, the 60 carriers who answered Milwaukee’s convention call—48 accredited delegates and at least 12 other participants—were not from the large cities such as Philadelphia and New York that had worked so hard for the passage of the eight-hour law, but primarily from small and middle-sized cities. So when August Dahlman of Milwaukee called the convention to order on Thursday, August 29, 1889 in the meeting hall above Schaefer’s Saloon at 244 West Water St., delegates elected John J. Goodwin of Providence, Rhode Island, as temporary chairman, perhaps in an effort to balance regional concerns.



William H. Wood,
NALC’s first
president.



Ironically, on August 29, 1889, the same day the NALC was founded, Samuel “Sunset” Cox, congressional champion for the eight-hour day for letter carriers, made his last public appearance—fittingly before a group of New York City carriers. Eleven days later, Cox was dead. Carriers all over the country mourned his death and began raising funds to erect a statue in his honor. On July 4, 1891, an eight-foot bronze statue of “Sunset” Cox was unveiled in lower Manhattan. Over 2,000 letter carriers from the New York City area, joined by delegations of letter carriers from cities as far away as San Francisco and New Orleans, attended the event.

Delegates moved quickly, unanimously adopting a resolution to form a National Association of Letter Carriers and then, on the next day, elected William Wood of Detroit as the first president and appointed an Executive Board to coordinate all legislative efforts.

THE REACTION

The Post Office Department was shocked when it found out the carriers had organized a union. Resistance followed the shock almost immediately. For example, in St. Louis, as in other cities, all the leaders of the local branch were summarily dismissed and the branch temporarily disbanded. In some communities, members of the union were brutally forced to work eight hours on and off over a 24-hour period. In other communities, union supporters were given the least desirable routes.

The initial response of many carriers when they heard that a national association had been organized was also one of resistance, coupled with suspicion. Generally speaking, carriers from the big cities had not taken part in the first, historic meeting in Milwaukee and they were unsure of how to respond to the so-called “national association.” Initially, they remained apart, and, in fact, sent a

legislative committee to lobby Congress during the 1889-90 legislative session—as did the new national association. The two groups immediately worked against each other, clashing over objectives. Congress, unsure of which one to deal with, refused to listen to or act upon either committee’s concerns.

Letter carriers were angry and upset over this legislative fiasco. The May 1890 issue of *The Postal Record*, a new publication devoted to the interests of all postal employees, contained an eloquent statement from John J. Goodwin, a member of the newly formed NALC Executive Board. He expressed the general frustration:

Hasn't the bitterness of complete failure sickened our friends of guerrilla warfare?

The need for united action was obvious. The question was: Were letter carriers capable of setting aside their differences and working together?



The two groups of carriers decided to try. The New York Letter Carriers Association organized a meeting of delegates from cities not connected with the NALC. Representatives from the NALC were also invited to attend. This conference was held in New York City on July 4, 1890—one month before the first annual convention of the NALC was to take place. During the meeting, letter carriers succeeded in ironing out their differences and merging their organizations into one, resolving “That every delegate at the Conference pledge himself to use his best efforts to further the interests of the National Association, and to induce their respective cities to promptly become branch associations....” The catchphrase at the time was, “We should be co-laborers in a common cause.” And this was the spirit with which carriers attended their first convention in August 1890 in Boston, Massachusetts, and elected Goodwin president and John F. Victory of New York secretary. The NALC was now truly launched.

The union grew rapidly after resolving its organizational crisis: 58 branches in August 1890, 231 branches by August

1891, and in August 1892, the NALC boasted 333 branches.

THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN

Once organized, the NALC immediately represented its members in a major confrontation with the Post Office Department. This battle—over the still-controversial eight-hour day—was to be a decisive one for the NALC.

The Post Office Department, extremely unhappy with passage in 1888 of the eight-hour law for carriers, openly ignored it for several months. Then the Department adopted a policy of deliberate evasion: It reinterpreted eight hours a day to mean eight hours a day for seven days a week—or 56 hours a week. For example, letter carriers who worked nine hours a day for six days still owed the Department two hours of work on Sunday. This deliberate misreading of the law was enforced throughout the country. But the NALC—with its feet barely on the ground—responded swiftly and forcefully by



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The Second Annual Convention of the NALC was held in Detroit, Michigan, August 5-7, 1891.



National Postal Museum Library



suing the federal government.

The suit startled everyone, especially the Post Office Department. Even more startling was the result: The NALC won the case in 1893, when the Supreme Court awarded letter carriers a total of \$3.5 million, settling thousands of overtime claims against the Department.

This first successful battle with the Post Office Department helped consolidate the new labor organization. Letter carriers formerly indifferent to the NALC or afraid to join because of management reprisals flocked to the union in great numbers. Only four years after the union's founding meeting in Milwaukee, its reputation as a fearless and successful advocate was permanently established.

The same year the NALC won its suit, the Post Office Department initiated a program which greatly aggravated its relations with the NALC and letter carriers. The "spotter system" was supposedly designed to weed out inefficient and dishonest letter carriers to improve service. In reality, the spotter system was initiated to cir-

cumvent the newly established civil service laws. It also harassed or forced from their jobs a good number of carriers who were active in the NALC. In fact, many letter carriers at the time believed the purpose of the system was to undermine the NALC.

The spotter system operated like this: hundreds of men, hired by the Department as a reward for their political loyalty to President Grover Cleveland and the Democratic party, were assigned to travel secretly from city to city literally to spy on carriers as they worked and to report all violations of work rules. If a charge against a carrier was sustained, the postmaster could fire the carrier and hire a new letter carrier of the right political persuasion—that is, a Democrat.

The spotters, none of them with postal experience, did their jobs exceedingly well. By the end of 1893, approximately one-third of the entire letter carrier force in Chicago, Cleveland, and Philadelphia had been brought up on charges.

The activities of these Department spies were repugnant to say the least, and the charges they brought against carriers ranged from the trivial to the malicious. For example, in 1895, 40 spotters brought charges against 173 Chicago letter carriers. Fifty of the carriers were charged with stopping to answer questions or to speak to their patrons as they delivered the mail. Only two of the charges were of a serious nature.

An example of the more malicious and outrageous charges carriers were forced to endure took place in Akron, Ohio, in 1895. A spotter was secretly watching a letter carrier on his route when the carrier happened to glance through a ground-floor window of a patron's home. Seeing a woman and child lying on the floor, he immediately entered the house, found the two almost suffocated by a gas leak, and carried them out to safety. The spotter reported the event to his superiors and recommended the letter carrier's dismissal for "deviation from his route." In the end, the carrier was suspended for 15 days without pay for violating postal work procedures.

Perhaps the most contemptible aspect of the spotter system was the manner in which letter carriers were told of the charges. In almost every case, carriers were not informed until months after the alleged violation had occurred. Then, without warning, a letter carrier would be asked to explain his behavior to postal officials. Naturally, few letter carriers were able to remember and

THE NALC SYMBOL: A LEGACY THAT LIVES

"The badges of the National Association have been received and the boys are highly delighted with them, and we are constantly being complimented on their beauty by the public."

So said a branch item submitted to *The Postal Record* from Indianapolis in 1891, referring to the new NALC symbol and reflecting the pride and enthusiasm letter carriers felt for the infant union.

The decision to adopt a union logo was made at the first NALC convention in August 1890, with the delegates appointing a committee to come up with a suitable design. The result—a hand bearing a letter addressed "U.S.A." within a circle encribed "National Association of Letter Carriers"—was adopted in January 1891. Produced as a gold badge hanging from a sheaf pin, the symbol soon became popular with carriers throughout the country.

The reason for producing a badge with a distinctive symbol was to help letter carriers—as union members and as skilled workers—identify one another. As reported in the 1890 *Postal Record*,

"these badges or emblems will be quite universal, and will protect Carriers and Postmasters of smaller offices from being imposed upon by anyone claiming themselves as P.O. men in good standing when they are not."

To ensure the sanctity of the badge, they could only be ordered by a branch secretary—at \$1.20 apiece in solid gold and 55 cents in gold plate.

NALC's decision to adopt a logo paralleled a trend developing throughout the young trade-union movement to identify goods produced by skilled union craftsmen. Among the oldest in the American labor movement, NALC's symbol continues to stand for letter carriers' pride in their union, their craft and their service to the public.





Hundreds of spotters were assigned to travel secretly from city to city literally to spy on carriers as they worked.

therefore could not adequately defend themselves.

This continual harassment gravely affected morale, and the NALC repeatedly protested to Department officials. The union submitted a formal protest on October 28, 1895, but the Department would not listen. Letter carriers were angry and frustrated, and no resolution was in sight. Finally, the press took up the carriers' cause. For example, the Superior, Wisconsin *Telegram* editorialized in 1895:

There may be some things which the present administration has done which the general public ... will commend, but the setting of a gang of spotters to dog the steps of Uncle Sam's carriers is not one of them.... It is a shame and a rank injustice to place the reputations of thousands of honest, hard-working men at the mercy of a horde of irresponsible fellows whose chief anxiety is to earn their salaries....

In March 1896, the spotter system was disbanded. Strong pressure from responsible newspapers had forced Congress to deny the Post Office

Department further funds for the employment of these spies.

THE EARLY OBJECTIVES OF THE NALC

It should be a source of pride to today's letter carriers that from the NALC's very inception, the union displayed deep concern for the plight of all carriers—those in small cities as well as those in big, the old as well as the young, substitutes as well as regulars.

When the letter carriers met in Milwaukee and Boston in 1889 and 1890, three issues were of paramount importance: a uniform wage structure, a minimum wage for substitutes, and a guaranteed pension for carriers. After these meetings, the NALC, as the representative of over 5,000 letter carriers, began its long, hard struggle to improve the working conditions of Uncle Sam's "gray coated carriers."



Priority number one was equalization of wages. The NALC believed all letter carriers should receive an annual wage of \$1,200, regardless of the size of the city in which they worked. An editorial in *The Postal Record* in 1889 described letter carriers' strong feelings on this issue:

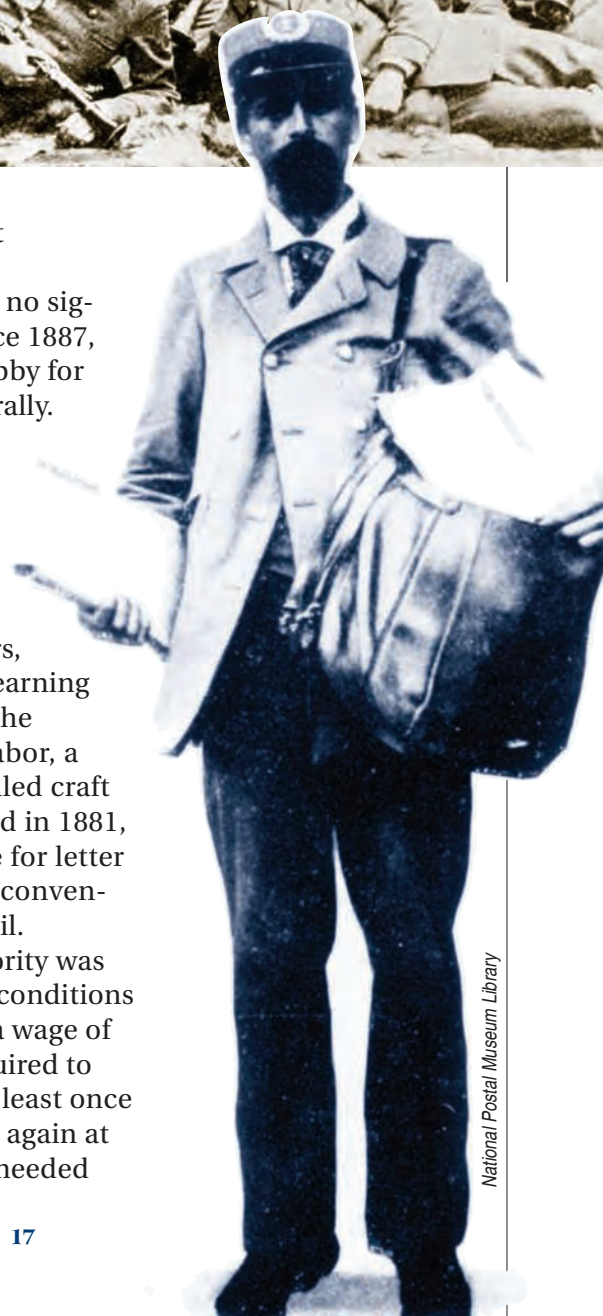
We have asked again and again what reason can be given for the distinction made between carriers in cities having a population of 75,000 and of those with less population. Do they work more hours? Manifestly not. Do they have any heavier bonds? Oh, no! Do they deliver more pieces per carrier? As an aggregate, yes; in individual cases, frequently not. Do they walk farther? No, the shoe is on the other foot!

Do they get any more pay? Yes, sir! They get one thousand dollars a year, while the carriers of the lesser cities who do the same work must be content with eight hundred and fifty dollars. Why is this so? We give up. Why should it be so? It shouldn't. It is an outrage.

But Congress would not budge on the issue.

By the early 1900s, with no significant wage increase since 1887, the NALC also began to lobby for an increase in wages generally. Carriers were beginning to lag seriously behind other workers in the labor market. While bricklayers were earning an average of \$4.00 a day in 1900, and carpenters, \$2.80, letter carriers were earning an average of \$2.21. Even the American Federation of Labor, a loosely knit alliance of skilled craft unions originally organized in 1881, endorsed a salary increase for letter carriers at its 23rd annual convention in 1902, but to no avail.

The NALC's second priority was alleviating the intolerable conditions of substitute carriers. For a wage of \$1 per year, subs were required to report to the post office at least once every morning—and often again at noon—to see if they were needed





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that day. If they worked, they received a daily wage; otherwise, they received no remuneration whatsoever.

Furthermore, it was impossible for a substitute to keep another job to support himself or his family, because if the post office needed him, the sub had to deliver the mail or be fired. In other words, substitute carriers were expected to eke out a bare existence until an opening in the civil service list occurred in three to five years, if not longer, before they could then be appointed regular carriers.

The adversity under which substitutes labored was graphically portrayed by an early 1900s substitute carrier who, with barbed humor, satirically described “a very economical dish for 6 o’clock dinner”—fit not for a king, but for a substitute:

Make a raise of a 10-cent soup bone, the nearer the hoof the more bone for the money; then for each member of the family take three nice, fresh, large snowballs... and put the whole mess into a kettle over a slow fire. When it comes to a boil, allow the mixture to simmer gently for two hours. Pepper and salt to taste. Serve. Should the family be increased by an additional member or two, add more snowballs of the same brand, take no substitute. But under no circumstances increase the quality of the bone, as there is a danger of gout, if made too rich. After a meal of this sort a man is fortified for at least two days to pack about fifty pounds of mail up any number of flights of stairs or up any old hill and to repel the attack of vicious dogs.

The NALC pleaded tirelessly with Congress to alleviate the distress of substitute carriers. As an article in a 1901 *Postal Record* stated, “all the glittering promises of future compensation will not feed or clothe a man.” But, again, the pleas fell on deaf ears.

STATE ASSOCIATIONS

NALC’s State Associations date back to at least as early as 1892, when letter carrier representatives from 17 smaller Massachusetts cities met to discuss the equalization of wages.

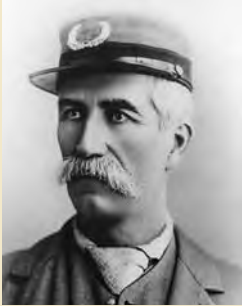
Originally established in response to a feeling that the National Association was not sensitive to this particular need, the meeting’s 41 delegates formed the Massachusetts Association of Letter Carriers of Second-Class Offices. Although organized as a challenge to the national union, the value of

state associations was soon recognized as a positive force. By July 1903, *The Postal Record* was able to report many large and enthusiastic meetings held by NALC State Associations. The *Record* extolled the benefits of state meetings of letter carriers, citing the promotion of mutual support, the sharing of opinion among branches, and the opportunities for members to meet their Congressmen.

Today, state associations exist in every state except Alaska and play a key role in NALC’s legislative activities. They marshal

members to contact their elected representatives on behalf of NALC-supported legislation, vote for union-endorsed political candidates, and contribute to the Committee on Letter Carriers Political Education, the union’s political fund. State associations also conduct legislative and political training sessions at their conventions attended by branch delegates and held at least once every two years, as well as on other occasions. Since 1978, every NALC member has been required to belong to a state association.

NALC PRESIDENTS



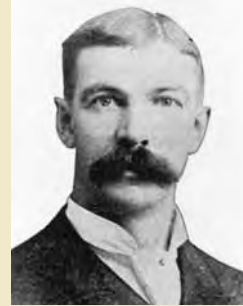
William H. Wood
1889-1890



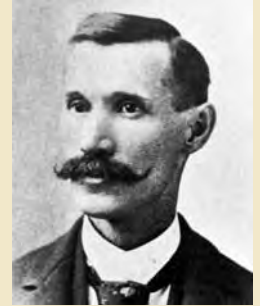
John J. Goodwin
1890-1891



Theodore C. Dennis
1891-1892



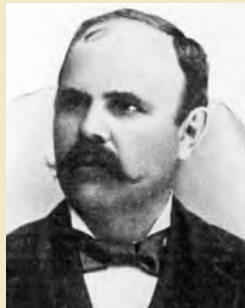
Frank E. Smith
1892-1893



C. C. Couden
1894



Richard F. Quinn
1895



John N. Parsons
1896-1900



James C. Keller
1901-1905



Jeremiah D. Holland
1905-1907



William E. Kelly
1907-1914



Edward J. Gainor
1914-1941



William C. Doherty
1941-1962



Jerome J. Keating
1962-1968



James H. Rademacher
1968-1977



J. Joseph Vacca
1977-1978



Vincent R. Sombrotto
1979-2002



William H. Young
2002-2009



Fredric V. Rolando
2009-

1902-1912

THE REIGN OF TERROR

Political agitation by letter carriers and the NALC did not go unnoticed in the government. Many members of Congress were bitterly opposed to the very existence of the NALC, believing that the organization was subversive and hence dangerous to American democracy. Interestingly enough, however, when federal laborers, workmen and mechanics first organized in the 1830s, the federal government did not challenge employees' right to unionize or even to strike. It was only when letter carriers and postal clerks—distinctly government employees rather than workers who might labor for anyone—formed unions that the government began to oppose organization. It based its opposition on a newly established principle: the government, as a sovereign employer, had rights and privileges above and beyond those of other employers and thus could impose any conditions it wished on its employees.



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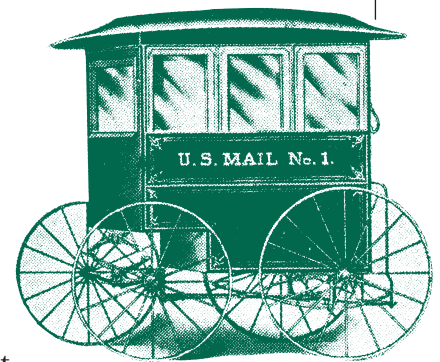
The first of a series of executive actions seeking to stamp out the NALC and other postal organizations was issued in 1895. Irritated with the increasing political activity of the NALC and the clerks' organizations, the postmaster general published an order prohibiting postal employees from visiting Washington, DC to influence legislation. This order, poorly enforced and widely ignored, was an important foreshadowing of what was to come, for in the 1900s when letter carriers and other postal employees lobbied vigorously for a pay raise and other legislation, conservative leaders in Congress complained to the president.

President Theodore Roosevelt, too, had been deluged with telegrams, letters and petitions from postal workers and their supporters. So on January 31, 1902, he seized the offensive and issued the first of the famous "gag orders." Roosevelt's executive order forbade all postal and federal employees, "directly or indirectly, individually or through associations," to solicit members of Congress for wage increases or to try to influence the passage of any other legislation—except through the heads of their department. The order, an attempt to muzzle or gag organizations like the

NALC, effectively deprived government workers of their constitutional rights to speak freely and to petition the government.

The NALC was thunderstruck at the gag rule's infringement of its rights and the rights of all letter carriers. The government's fierce opposition and oppression were completely inappropriate given the relatively mild—if irritating—activity in which the NALC was engaged: lobbying, election activity, and other political pressures. But the NALC's organizational strength and the open support it received from the organized labor movement undoubtedly intensified the government's fears. And although it was customary for members of Congress to pressure letter carriers for support prior to an election campaign, it was a relatively new and uncomfortable experience to have that pressure reversed.

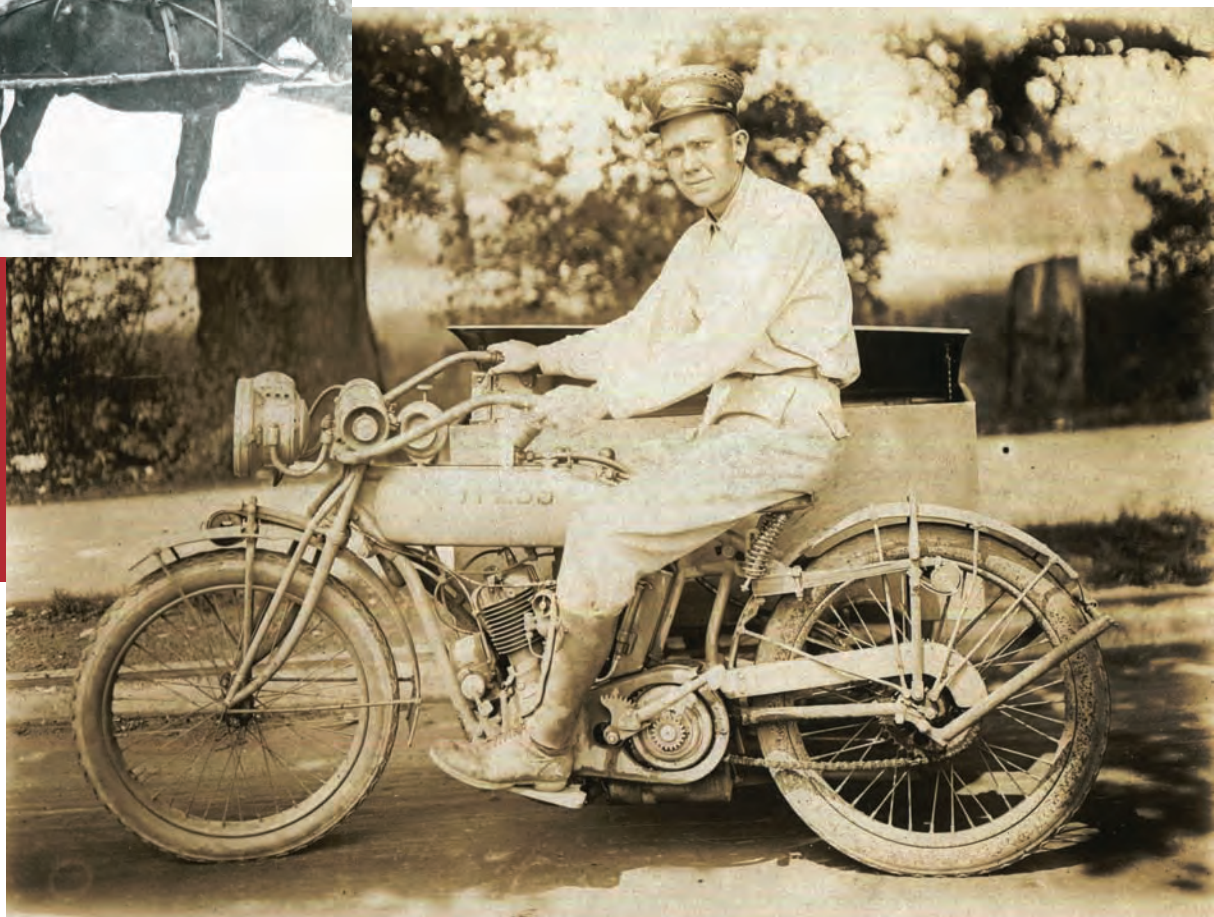
The gag rule of 1902 was only the beginning of the reign of terror inflicted by the government and Post Office Department. In 1906, Roosevelt issued another executive order that permitted department heads to dismiss employees without notice and—contrary to previous practices—without stating the reasons in writing. In addition, letter carri-





While the Post Office was still using horse-drawn vehicles to deliver the mail in the early 1900s (as in Oakland, CA, pictured above), it was also experimenting with motorized vehicles, including motorcycles.

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ers and postal clerks could no longer discuss their working conditions in public. Finally, in 1909, President William Howard Taft forbade postal and federal employees from answering congressional requests for information on their pay or working conditions unless authorized to do so by their department heads.

The NALC and other postal organizations did not know how to respond to this massive governmental attack. Although the president of the NALC, James C. Keller, personally presented a memorandum to Roosevelt stating the NALC's objection to the 1902 executive order, the gag was not rescinded. In the end, the NALC accepted the gag as a recognized rule of federal government because the union believed it was important to maintain good relations with the Post Office Department. As Keller stated in 1903:

We know that to enjoy the better conditions, we must earn them, and earning them, we must secure them in the right manner. For should we attempt to secure any benefits by

questionable methods, we, as government employees, would bring discredit upon ourselves as well as the service in which we are engaged.

Acceptance of the gag, however, certainly did not mean the NALC ceased representing its members. The Association continued to fight for legislation, but the gag rule's prohibition of open legislative activities made it far more difficult for the union to have a direct impact on issues of concern to carriers. To circumvent the gag, NALC representatives and other letter carriers talked to their congressional friends on an informal and private basis—but always with the realization that, if caught, they would be punished. Furthermore, the gag rule allowed the NALC to endorse legislation which the Department itself had already approved. Frustrating as this indirect role was, the NALC remained as active as it could in the legislative arena, obtaining a modest pay increase in 1907.



The New York Evening Journal

THE POSTMAN

There's a man about the town,
Climbing up and coming down
On his round;
And he brings us cheerful news,
Or perhaps a case of blues,
Twice a day.

With a sure and patient pace,
With a keen and kindly face,
He comes 'round;
He is whole-souled and discreet,
And wears half-soles on his feet
Toward the ground.

There's an angle in his back,
Made by that eternal pack
That he bears;
But the public never knows,
Nor would any one suppose,
That he cares.

Is the weather scorching hot?
He complains not of his lot
Nor is sad;
Does there come a zero spell?
His refrain is "All is well,"
And he's glad.

Bearer of the nation's load.
Packhorse of the path and road.
He is true
To his trust and to his task—
Almost anything you ask
He will do.

Postman, nameless though you be
I have carved a niche for thee
In my heart;
Postman with the sloping back,
Half-soled shoes and heavy sack.
Play your part!

—Austin, Texas

Not surprisingly, however, as working conditions deteriorated and the morale of all postal employees plummeted, militant factions arose in the ranks of postal workers, especially the railway postal clerks. Unrest, defiance of orders, work stoppages and threats of formal strikes erupted throughout the service, particularly after the last gag order in 1909. And in spite of the Department's efforts to prevent it, the complaints of workers—including letter carriers—finally reached Congress.

By 1910, when the Democrats won control of the House of Representatives, the political climate had changed. Robert LaFollette, a progressive Republican Senator from Wisconsin, led an anti-gag campaign. NALC President William E. Kelly urged passage of anti-gag legislation before the Senate Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, and Samuel

Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, also actively supported removal of the gag from the mouths of postal and federal workers and their unions. Unfortunately, the President of the United States, William Howard Taft, participated in the campaign by publicly defending the gag rule in 1911:

Government employees are a privileged class upon whose entry into government service it is entirely reasonable to impose conditions that should not and ought not be imposed upon those who serve private employers.

Yet despite Taft's plea, the Congress of the United States decided the government's claim of special status had gone too far. On August 24, 1912, the Lloyd-LaFollette Act was enacted, rescinding the gag rule and ending 10 years of severe repression of letter carriers and other government workers.



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THE NO-STRIKE AMENDMENT

The Lloyd-LaFollette Act of 1912 was the most important piece of legislation affecting the rights of letter carriers and the NALC until 1962 when John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988 establishing a formal labor relations program in the federal government. Besides outlawing the gag rule and guaranteeing government workers the right to petition and lobby Congress, the Lloyd-LaFollette Act recognized the right of postal and federal employees to organize and join labor organizations. The legislation, however, contained one proviso: it

forbade postal employees from affiliating with any outside organization which imposed “an obligation or duty...to engage in any strike against the United States” or which proposed to assist postal employees in such a strike. This no-strike amendment was inserted at the last moment to ease the minds of those senators who feared that affiliation with the American Federation of Labor might draw postal and federal workers into a strike against the government.

At the same time Congress passed the Lloyd-LaFollette Act in 1912, it also passed two other bills: The Reilly Eight-in-Ten Hour Act and the Mann Sunday Closing Act. The Reilly law, legislation which the NALC had been working for since 1909, specified that postal employees could not be required to spread their eight-hour shift over a period of more than 10 consecutive hours. This act ended the cruel practice of making employees—especially union activists—work around-the-clock on a “stop and go” basis. The second law mandated the closing of post offices on Sunday, assuring letter carriers and postal clerks one day of rest in seven.

All in all, 1912 was not a bad year for letter carriers and the NALC.

MUTUAL BENEFIT ASSOCIATION

From its earliest years, the NALC pioneered programs for mutual support and welfare to complement its struggles for improved working conditions. Even before the union was founded in 1889, letter carriers in several cities had formed local mutual aid associations that provided mutual support and welfare.

By 1891, the fledgling national union took on this responsibility when it established the Mutual Benefit Association at its Detroit

convention. Incorporated the next year in Tennessee, the MBA offered low-cost life and other kinds of insurance to help protect letter carriers and their families.

A second program, the National Sick Benefit Association, was established at the NALC’s convention in Portland, Oregon in 1905. It was organized primarily for members in smaller branches, since most of the large branches had already set up their own sick benefit plans. The Association provided

benefits of \$8 a week for up to 20 weeks to carriers unable to work due to accident or illness; insurance premiums were between 55 and 80 cents per month.

Today, the U.S. Letter Carriers Mutual Benefit Association, run by elected union officers, makes available to members life insurance, annuities and hospital confinement coverage products—thus continuing the NALC’s long tradition of mutual support and assistance.

NALC AUXILIARY

Laboring under oppressive working conditions, poorly paid and unable to lobby Congress for wage increases or other legislation to improve their plight, letter carriers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries turned to the women in their families for support in the fight for dignity and security at the workplace.

As a result, a number of local “Ladies Auxiliaries” were formed, but with the issuance of President Theodore Roosevelt’s infamous 1902 gag order, it became even clearer that a unified national effort was necessary.

Responding to an organizing call from Portland, Oregon Branch 82’s Ladies Auxiliary, 72 women from 52 cities in 26 states met September 5, 1905 during NALC’s fifth national convention in Portland to form a National Ladies Auxiliary, forerunner of today’s NALC Auxiliary. They unanimously elected as the organization’s first president Nellie Heffelfinger, a member of Branch 24’s Auxiliary in Los Angeles. Their goal, Heffelfinger stated, was to “aid wherever possible the carriers, both socially and financially.” Four days later, NALC’s delegates formally recognized its new partner during the union’s convention when, not coincidentally, the union had implicitly recognized the importance of women voters to its legislative endeavors by adopting a resolution in support of women’s suffrage, still 15 years in the future.

Roosevelt issued a second gag order in 1906, and President William Howard Taft further

restricted the rights of postal and federal workers three years later—both additional gag orders making the Auxiliary’s role championing letter carrier rights more essential. Although the 1912 Lloyd-LaFollette Act lifted the gag orders, the National Ladies Auxiliary grew steadily, creating new local auxiliaries throughout the country and, beginning in 1921, state auxiliaries. Simultaneously it played an important role in the union’s legislative campaigns for salary increases, Sunday post office closings, shorter Saturday work days, paid sick leave, 40-hour work weeks, and the establishment of the Civil Service Retirement System in 1920. The passage of the 1939 Hatch Act prohibiting partisan political activity by postal and federal workers also reinforced the importance of the Auxiliary in fighting for letter carriers wages, benefits and fair working conditions.

As women entered the carrier workforce in the 1960s, men became eligible for Auxiliary memberships, and in 1974, the organization dropped “Ladies” from its title. Open to all family members age 16 and above for decades, the organization still consists primarily of the wives and female relatives of male letter carriers. The advent of collective bargaining moved many key issues from the legislative arena to the negotiating table, and Hatch Act reform legislation in 1993 has allowed active carriers to participate more fully in electoral politics. Nonetheless, the NALC Auxiliary remains an essential part of the union’s legislative program.

The first officers of NALC’s National Ladies Auxiliary



President
Nellie Heffelfinger
Los Angeles, CA



Vice President
Dora M. Carl
Toledo, OH



Secretary
Grace O. Wheeler
Portland, OR



Treasurer
Mary E. Curtin
Lynn, MA

1913-1920

THE NALC VS. THE PMG



After the passage of the Lloyd-LaFollette Act in 1912, letter carriers and the NALC breathed a collective sigh of relief and experienced a brief moment of respite. But this respite was harshly interrupted when the new president, Woodrow Wilson, appointed Albert S. Burleson as postmaster general in March 1913.

Burleson, one of the most anti-union postmaster generals in postal history, immediately declared a new war on postal employees and their unions. His goal was to run the Department at a profit, and he chose to do this at the expense of the postal workforce.

As soon as he took office, Burleson demanded the repeal of all three of the progressive laws passed in 1912. He also vehemently opposed any pay increases for letter carriers and postal clerks in spite of a dramatic rise in the cost of living once World War I began in 1914. By 1916, the dollar was worth half of what it had been in 1907—the year letter carriers had last received a pay increase. Incredibly, when Congress voted a 10 percent pay increase for all federal employees in 1917—a year when the cost of living jumped by 20.3 percent—Burleson succeeded in excluding postal employees from the raise. Furthermore, Burleson opposed all bills designed to establish pensions or annuities for postal employees. He believed that when a worker's job performance declined due to old age, he should be demoted or fired—no matter how many years the worker had labored for the Department. Last, but not least, Burleson refused to recognize or to meet with any representatives from the NALC, and even called for the dissolution of all postal employee unions. In fact, Burleson refused to grant leave without pay to the officers of the postal unions, forcing NALC President Edward Gainor to resign from the Post Office to continue performing his union duties.

In response to such blatant anti-worker and anti-union policies, the NALC shed the habits developed during the gag years and sprang into action. With its gag now removed, the NALC once again took its fight directly to Capitol Hill and once again began to build close relations with congressional committees. Letter carriers desperately needed a pay raise, sick leave benefits, compensation for disability and retirement benefits, and the union began to lobby hard for critical legislation that had been delayed or ignored by the Department and Congress.

The rank and file supported this renewed and vigorous activity. For example, in a letter to *The Postal Record* in 1916, a carrier from Buffalo, New York, urged action on wage legislation:

It took us many long years to obtain our last increase [1907], but then we begged as the supplicant begs. Now we must make a respectful but insistent demand: not for the sop to be thrown at us, but for a living wage that will enable us to have meat at least once a week without having to put our watch in pawn.

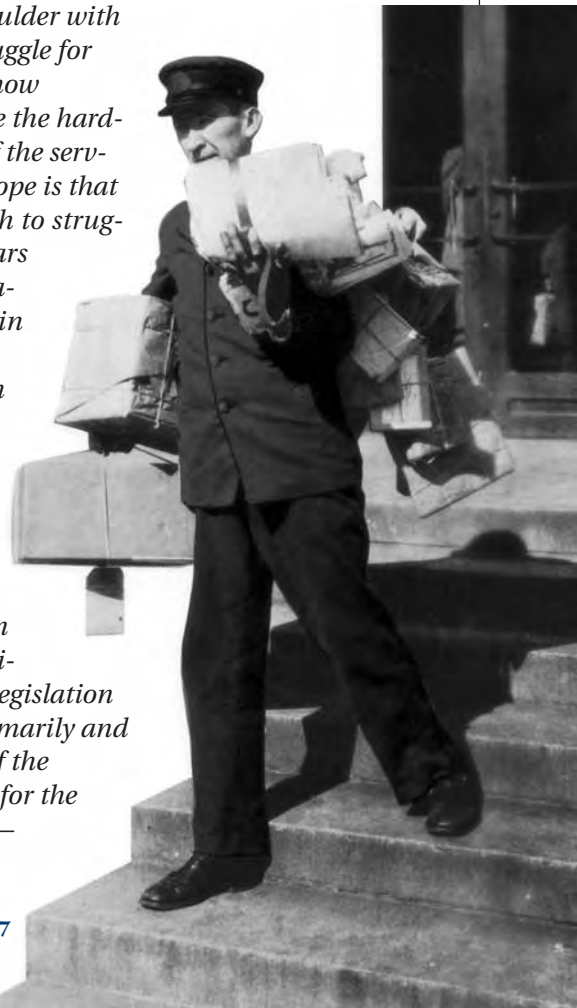
Although no salary bill was passed in 1916, the NALC was successful on two fronts that year. First, when Burleson arbitrarily decided to pay carriers who collected the mail \$200 a year less than those who delivered it, the NALC protested the change to its congressional friends. In response, Congress enacted a bill which made such a salary distinction illegal. Second, on September 7, 1916 the NALC obtained passage of one of the most important laws to affect letter carriers then and now—the first Federal Employees’ Compensation Act. This landmark legislation provided that federal employees suffering work-related injuries would receive compensation for disability and death as well as medical care.

RETIREMENT: LOBBYING, PROTESTS, REBELLION

One of the most interesting by-products of the NALC’s struggle against Burleson was the development of a strong concern with the plight of the older letter carrier.

Since its founding in 1889, the NALC had been lobbying unsuccessfully for some kind of annuity or pension for old carriers, or, as they were then called, “the superannuated carriers.” The issue was so important it remained alive even during the gag years. In 1907 a carrier wrote this eloquent statement to *The Postal Record*:

These old comrades of ours who have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with us for years in our struggle for better conditions are now scarcely able to endure the hardships and exactions of the service ... and their only hope is that they may have strength to struggle along for a few years more until the association [NALC] succeeds in doing something for them. Hundreds are in that condition now and thousands will soon be, and even you, the reader of this, if you are a letter carrier and live long enough, will be in exactly the same condition, for this pension legislation that we seek is not primarily and solely for the benefit of the old men of today; it is for the old men of the future—you and I as well.





National Archives

Mrs. Nellie M. McGrath delivering mail during World War I.

Once Burleson became postmaster general in 1913, the NALC devoted more and more energy and resources to the problems of retired and soon-to-be retired carriers. Igniting this activity were Burleson's adamant opposition to any retirement benefits and the Department's callous firing of old carriers who could not keep up with the job's demanding pace. A three-pronged movement emerged. The NALC led the movement by lobbying Capitol Hill unceasingly for retirement legislation. The National Ladies Auxiliary, also long a force in the retirement arena, accelerated its activities. And rank and file carriers engaged in demonstrations and protests throughout the country.

Perhaps the most dramatic of these protests occurred in Fairmont, West Virginia, in 1915. The Fairmont postmaster, complying with Burleson's strict instructions, fired an old letter carrier because he could no longer perform his job satisfactorily. Furious at the postmaster, the remaining 25 employees—letter carriers and postal clerks alike—decided to protest by resigning from their jobs at the same time. All 25 workers were then immediately arrested and thrown in jail for striking against the federal government.

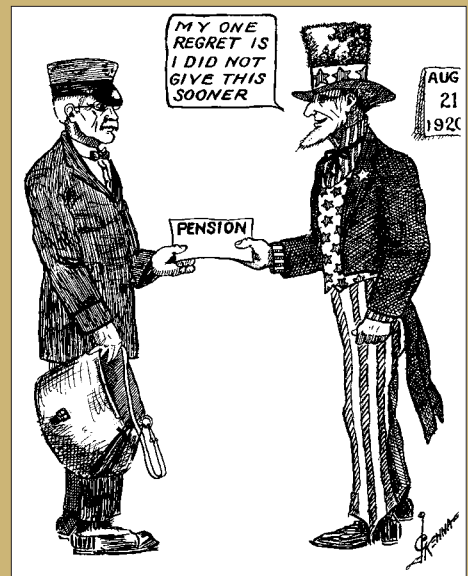
The jailed workers were shocked at the government's reaction. They were not striking—they had simply quit their jobs. But the government persisted in prosecuting the case. Without money to pay for their defense, the carriers and clerks threw themselves on the mercy of the court. In turn, the court imposed fines ranging from \$5 to \$500 upon all but one of the employees—the 25th worker, a letter carrier by the name of W. H. Fisher, had hanged himself in his cell on the night before his trial.

Interestingly, the question of whether mass resignations of federal employees were actually strikes had been discussed at length four years earlier, during the anti-gag hearings in 1911. The American Federation of Labor defended the right of "one man" or a "thousand" men to resign, while the Post Office Department insisted that a mass resignation was an act of coercion and conspiracy against the United States. The issue was still unresolved when the Lloyd-LaFollette Act was passed in 1912. But this did not stop the government in Fairmont three years later. Its response was quick and devastating, a lesson not lost on letter carriers.

AFFILIATION WITH THE AFL

In the midst of the oppressive Burleson years, a major debate was taking place within the NALC: Should the NALC affiliate with the American Federation of Labor?

The debate over affiliation began in the early 1900s. When a committee appointed at NALC's 1903 national convention reported back to dele-



gates two years later, it recommended against affiliation, fearful that the Federation's priorities might begin to take precedence over those of letter carriers. In 1914, when the question was once again raised, many carriers were worried about the strike issue. Unfamiliar with the goals and structure of the AFL, many carriers wrongly believed that the AFL leaders could order a strike, forcing them to defy the no-strike amendment of 1912. Other carriers feared affiliation with the AFL would diminish the NALC's own identity. Still others believed the NALC could take care of itself and need not affiliate with any other organization. And undoubtedly a great number of letter carriers, still bruised and nervous after more than 10 years of the gag, were simply not ready for affiliation with the broader labor movement.

Not surprisingly, then, when a referendum vote on the question was finally tallied in August 1914, 18,769 letter carriers voted against and 3,968 voted for affiliation.

Yet by 1917, when the issue arose again, the tone of the debate was very different. Letter carriers demonstrated more awareness of the strong and important connection between the history of letter carriers and that of the rest of the labor

movement. One carrier used the pages of *The Postal Record* to remind NALC members of the nationwide campaign for an eight-hour day in the late 1880s:

The first 8-hour law for letter carriers was approved May 24, 1888, a year before the NALC was organized. The streets of many a mill town have run red with the blood of wage workers [so] that we [letter carriers] of today might enjoy an 8-hour day.

The 664 delegates to the national convention in Dallas in September 1917 were obviously moved by the same sentiments. When President Gainor recommended that the affiliation issue be submitted to a referendum by the membership, delegate after delegate arose, pleading instead for an immediate vote on the issue. A carrier from New Orleans forcefully expressed the majority's view on affiliation:





I believe the only real relief we can find is by affiliating with other men laboring by the sweat of their brow, men who have united for their own protection and that protection can only be secured through direct and immediate affiliation with the American Federation of Labor.

Moved by these impassioned pleas, the convention suspended its rules and,

by a voice vote, the delegates directed the secretary of the NALC to affiliate immediately with the AFL, which the union did on September 20, 1917.

When the convention's action was tested in a nationwide referendum in early 1918, 92 percent of the NALC membership voted for affiliation—in startling contrast to 83 percent against it in 1914. What accounted for this dramatic turnaround? The question can be answered in three words: Postmaster General Burleson. His savage anti-worker policies convinced carriers in 1917 that they needed the protection and support of the rest of the labor movement.

Buoyed by its affiliation with the AFL, the NALC turned its energies to the legislative front, intent on improving the situation in spite of Burleson. In 1917, a carrier described these activities in amusing terms:

For years we have been howling our heads off for a retirement law. We went to Rochester and hurrahed for a straight pension. We went to San Francisco, waved flags and hurrahed some more, making retirement the paramount issue.... We pestered our Congressmen with letters and telegrams until we became almost a nuisance. Then we had our friends and relatives and fraternal organizations

send letters and telegrams to our Congressmen....

Three years later, the NALC's persistent and prolonged efforts finally bore fruit. On May 22, 1920, the Civil Service Retirement Act became law, and for the first time, letter carriers received retirement benefits. The legislation itself provided for retirement at age 65 with annuities ranging from \$180 to \$720 per year. Carriers also registered impressive legislative gains on June 5, when a bill giving carriers their first sick leave benefits—10 days a year—and a salary bill increasing wages to a scale ranging from \$1,400 to \$1,800 a year were enacted.

For letter carriers and the NALC, 1920 was indeed a time of harvest.

RESISTANCE TO TAYLORISM

At the same time the NALC was voting to affiliate with the AFL and lobbying for progressive legislation for letter carriers, the union was fiercely resisting a new phenomenon in America: the scientific management movement. The NALC was not alone in this struggle, for many trade unions in both the private and public sector were also resisting the encroachment of scientific management into their workplaces.

Scientific management—also called “Taylorism” after its founder, Frederick Winslow Taylor—was an attempt by management to apply the methods of science to the workplace. Its purpose was to completely control all decisions on the job—many of which were then made by the worker—and increase workers' total productivity and efficiency.

The Post Office Department, intrigued with the new movement, began to experiment with Taylorism during Burleson's regime. The Department called its program



Such standards may seem normal to carriers of today ... but to carriers in the early 1900s, the system was shocking—an aberration.

“the efficiency system.” Department officials would single out the youngest, most physically fit carrier and use him as their “average carrier.” The officials would watch the carrier as he worked, measuring with a stopwatch each and every task performed both in the office and on the street. The carrier’s pace, measured in minutes, became the

standard by which all other carriers were expected to perform. Naturally, few letter carriers could easily maintain the pace, which forced them to speed up their efforts. Some even had to run instead of walking their routes to return to their stations by the required time.

Such standards may seem normal to carriers of today who are expected to case mail according to the “18 & 8” guidelines. But to carriers in the early 1900s, the system was shocking—an aberration. They were not used to such strict control and pressure, and they found it cruel and dehumanizing. Carriers who could not maintain the accelerated pace were often punished with a reduction in wages and some were dismissed. Many carriers even broke down under the mental and physical strain.

The NALC, besieged on all fronts by Burleson, tried to fight against Taylorism by lobbying hard for what was called “anti-

stopwatch” legislation. In 1916, the union backed the Tavenner Bill, which called for outlawing the stopwatch and other time-measuring devices in time-motion studies of any government job. The Tavenner bill, however, was never passed, and the NALC—like other unions—was unsuccessful in its attempts to prevent scientific management from invading the workplace.

Women delivering the mail during World War I.



USPS Library



National Postal Museum Library

1921-1928

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY

In 1921, the new president, Warren G. Harding, usually regarded as one of the worst presidents of the United States, appointed a new postmaster general, Will H. Hays, to succeed the much-hated Burlison.

Four days after taking office, Hays electrified all postal employees with this proclamation:

Every effort shall be exercised to humanize the ... [post office department]. Labor is not a commodity... There are 300,000 employees. They have the brain[s] and they have the hand[s] to do the job well; and they shall have the heart to do it well.

Seven days later, on March 16, Hays invited the president of the NALC, Edward J. Gainor, and the leaders of other postal organizations to meet for informal discussions. At the meeting, he announced an open-door policy to the leaders of the postal unions and invited them to see him whenever they had a problem.

Letter carriers responded enthusiastically to Hays' proclamation and his positive attitude toward the NALC. The April 1921 issue of *The Postal Record* described the outpouring of good feeling in an article entitled "The Dawn of a New Day":



When one emerges from a dungeon into the sunlight, one is temporarily blinded and confused. Letter carriers and other postal employees are in a similar situation.... The selection of Mr. Hays of the word “humanize” in expressing the Department’s attitude toward the men and women workers in the postal establishment, was happy.... Not in years has such a sentiment been expressed by a head of this Department. How strange and yet how sweet!

To improve the working conditions of postal employees, Hays sought to develop a closer relationship with representatives from the various postal employees’ organizations. To this end, he established a National Welfare Council—later called the National Service Relations Council. The national president and secretary of the NALC both played an active role in the activities of the Council right from its inception in 1921. In fact, NALC Secretary Edward Cantwell served as the Executive of the Council from its inauguration until his death in 1924.

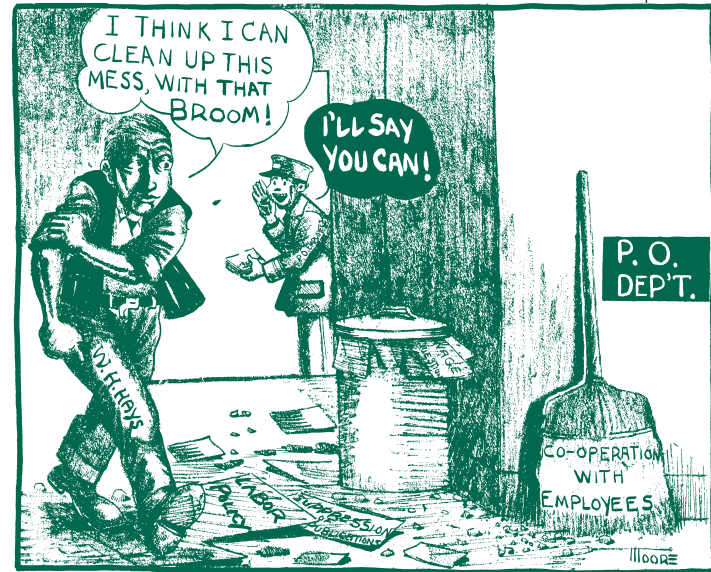
On the national level, the National Service Relations Council discussed topics directly related to the welfare of city delivery letter carriers such as uniforms, the possibility of a Christmas holiday, working conditions within local post offices, cafeterias, credit unions, and free physical examinations for workers. Local Welfare Councils were also established to focus

on conditions within individual post offices, including such issues as drinking fountains, swing rooms, dust, sanitation and lighting.

Will Hays remained in office only one year.

Although no important legislation affecting letter carriers was passed by Congress during his year in office, Hays’ commitment to improving the working lives of letter carriers and his belief that improvement in conditions and morale would improve delivery service for the American people left a lasting legacy.

When Hays resigned, the NALC continued its tradition of honoring friends by making Hays an honorary lifetime member of the NALC. Pleased, yet uncomfortable with the term “honorary,” Hays asked to become a regular dues-paying member instead. The NALC Constitution did not permit anyone to pay dues who had not earned that right by carrying the mail, but an exception was made for Will Hays—a member of the NALC until his death in 1954.



NALC BANDS

“One need but read the branch items ... to note how the finished and altogether admirable work of these bands feature in many demonstrations held under the auspices of this Association. They grace banquets, entertainments and social sessions. They enliven a smoker.... And on the occasion of our great national conventions where, happily, many Letter Carriers’ Bands

invariably lend their presence, they give zest and color to the gathering....”

This glowing tribute in 1922 by NALC Secretary Edward J. Cantwell aptly describes the activities of the letter carrier bands over the years, especially during the union’s formative decades. Musically gifted carriers first organized letter carrier bands in the late 19th century, which came together in massive parades during

the union’s early national conventions.

Over the past several decades, the bands’ importance has diminished since few band members are letter carriers, and convention parades are no longer held. Nonetheless, a sizable number of bands remain to perform at conventions and local events, thus preserving the union’s traditions of music and service.



National Postal Museum Library

A parcel post carrier from Indianapolis in 1923.

A CHANGE IN TACTICS

Although Hays' term of office was brief, his administration set the tone for relations between the NALC and the Department for the rest of the decade. As a result of this climate of mutual respect, the NALC—which by this time had created one of the most successful lobbies on Capitol Hill—decided to seize the offensive in the fall of 1923 when it embarked on a major campaign to achieve a living wage for postal

employees. This campaign, led by the NALC but waged by all the postal unions, was one of the biggest in the history of postal unionism.

Letter carriers' wages in the early 1920s were miserably inadequate. The 1920 salary bill—which had raised letter carrier salaries to between \$1,400 and \$1,800 per year—was obsolete the day it was passed. And in the rapidly expanding economy of the early 1920s, the wages of letter carriers and other postal workers lagged further and further behind the wages of workers in the private sector.

The salary campaign opened at the NALC's 24th Biennial Convention in 1923 in Providence, Rhode Island, and spread to every congressional district in the country. Acting on the advice of NALC National Headquarters, many local branches formed special campaign committees and enlisted the support of local associations of postal clerks, rural letter carriers, railway mail clerks, and even supervisory officials. These committees presented their case to patrons, Boards of Commerce, representatives and senators. Mass meetings

THE SUB BY B.F. ELLISON JR., LOS ANGELES

*See that poor ragged
Hungry looking guy,
Working when he can
And trying to get by!
Wondering how and where
He'll get his next grub—
Folks call him "The Mail Man,"
But he's just a Sub.*

*He goes home at night
To his wife and his child
Ashamed of his plight
And more worries pile;
His purpose beaten
By fate's blunt cruel club—
Folks call him "The Mail Man,"
But he's just a Sub.*

*But, what does he get—
He's done no one harm;
The rain and the wet,
The snow and the storm,
Still he does his best
Though he plays the dub—
Folks call him "The Mail Man,"
But he's just a Sub.*

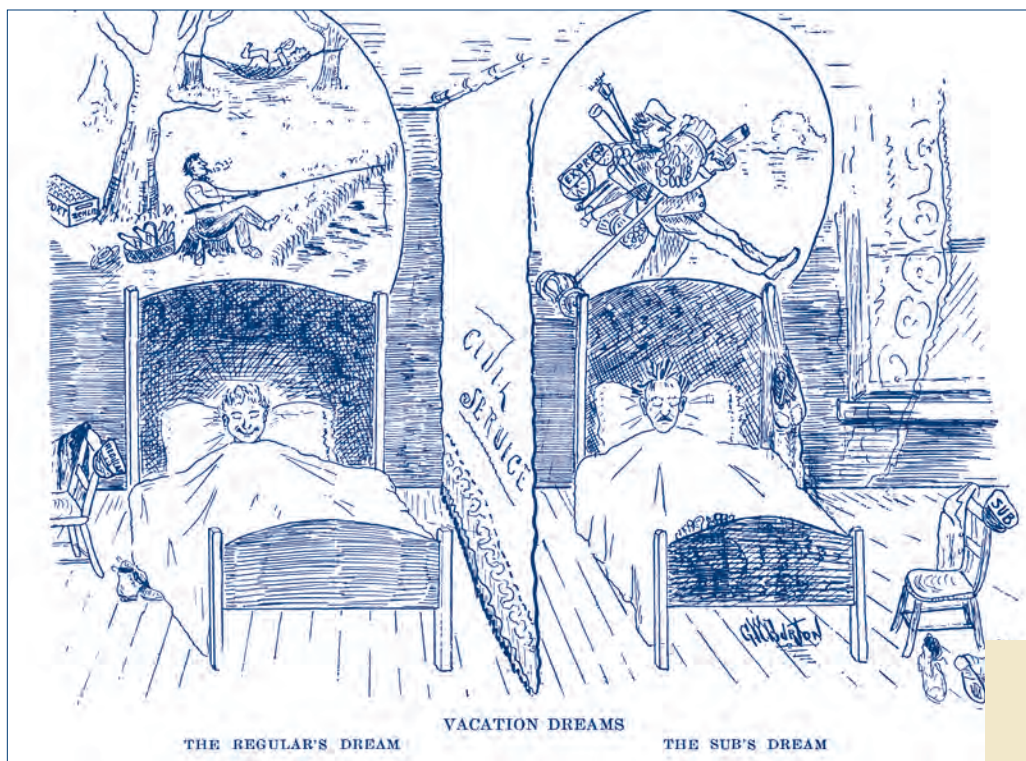
*Of course he's a man—
A good worker, too,
But often he's told:
"There's nothing to do."
When in fact there is—
Piles, in many a tub—
Folks call him "The Mail Man,"
But he's just a Sub.*

*Reports for duty
Real early at dawn,
Waits and hangs around
Till the Regulars are gone.
He's treated just like
A cigarette stub—
Folks call him "The Mail Man,"
But he's just a Sub.*

*"No Work Today,"
But I stuck around
In hopes they would say
For you work's been found,
But useless it was
They gave me the rub—
Folks call me "The Mail Man,"
But I'm just a Sub.*

*Nice little dainties
For kiddies to eat—
Good wholesome food
And much needed meat—
How can he buy them?
No money, poor cub—
Folks call him "The Mail Man,"
But he's just a Sub.*

*Isn't there some way
To lighten his load
So he can pay—
The bills he has owed?
Sure, he's a good sport
But tires of being snubbed—
Folks call him "The Mail Man,"
But he's just a Sub.*



of postal employees were held in cities and towns as diverse as Piqua, Ohio, and New York City. A letter carrier from Pittsburgh proclaimed “\$2,400 or bust” in *The Postal Record*, and added:

The days for idle talk are past, and the time for action is here. Let every postal employee take a hand in this affair, and make the halls of Congress echo and re-echo with the voice of the people.

The campaign was so effective that some members of Congress, irritated with the tidal wave of letters supporting a wage increase, criticized the NALC and the other postal organizations. Nevertheless, in June 1924, a bill was passed that increased wages by \$300 a year to a maximum level of \$2,100 and raised substitutes’ wages to 65 cents an hour. Not only did the bill pass, but it passed by overwhelming majorities: 73-3 in the Senate and 361-6 in the House.

The NALC’s success was short-lived—despite widespread support for the bill, President Coolidge vetoed it. And the veto took a particularly damaging form: Congress received the veto message the same day it adjourned for the fall elections, making it impossible to override the president’s action.

By the time the Congress reassembled on December 1, 1924, the mood and temper were different. William C. Doherty, later the president of the NALC, described the congressional about-face: “They did not love us in December as they did in June.” The NALC and other postal organizations lobbied frantically but, in the end, failed to obtain the necessary support. Coolidge’s veto was sustained by a single vote in the Senate on January 6, 1925.

Although disappointed, the NALC did not give up as it made clear in the July 1924 *Postal Record*:

The salary campaign will go on to successful conclusion.... We will march on to certain success. Thrice armed is he whose cause is just. We will not fail.

On February 28, 1925—after a renewed campaign of intensive lobbying—the NALC and the other postal unions won the wage fight when Coolidge reluctantly signed new legislation that incorporated the salary provisions of the earlier bill.

In the rapidly expanding economy of the early 1920s, the wages of letter carriers and other postal workers lagged further and further behind the wages of workers in the private sector.



1929-1949

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

It was around noon on October 24, 1929, when the stock market began to crumble. By 2:30 p.m. the ticker tape was almost two hours late, and five days later, on October 29, it was all over. The stock market had crashed and the Great Depression was soon to follow.

Almost immediately, unemployment began to mount at the rate of 4,000 workers per week, and then the ranks of the jobless seemed to have no limits. Four million were unemployed in 1930, 11 million in 1932, nearly 13 million by 1933. Thousands upon thousands of workers—unable to meet mortgage payments or pay rent—lost their homes. Many of the newly poor built homes of scrap metal and egg crates in city dumps. Bread and soup lines stretched endlessly through the nation's cities. Some lived on bread and coffee; others picked over garbage cans to feed their families.

William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, told a congressional committee in 1930 that in Detroit, Michigan, “the men are sitting in the parks all day long and all night long, hundreds and thousands of them—muttering to themselves, ‘out of work, seeking work.’” And in the summer of 1932, people were marching in Washington, DC’s Anacostia Flats singing:

Mellon pulled the whistle
Hoover rang the bell
Wall Street gave the signal
—And the country went to Hell.*

*Andrew Mellon, a powerful banker and industrialist, was Secretary of the Treasury at the time.

Letter carriers and other postal employees found themselves in a strange situation during the early days of the Depression. Before the Depression, most Americans considered the average pay of a letter carrier—\$2,064 per year—a mediocre salary. But during the Depression, it was an enviable amount of money. And in a nation of 13 million unemployed, the security of postal jobs made such positions even more attractive. In 1933, a letter carrier from Oregon described this ironic reversal:

All my neighbors are out of work, and if I go to them and cry about my condition they think I am crazier now than I was five years ago when they used to tell me to throw away that mail sack and get a decent job. Now, any one of them would be glad to carry mail for a dollar a day...

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that letter carrier and postal clerk positions attracted some of the country's best educated people—who in easier times might have become lawyers, doctors or teachers. Jerome J. Keating, president of the NALC from 1962 to 1968, was a notable example of this phenomenon. Keating became a substitute carrier in March 1924 to help pay his way through college. After graduating from the University of Minnesota in 1930, he had the opportunity to become an instructor and later a professor. But Keating decided to remain a letter carrier because a letter carrier's job offered more security during the Great Depression than that of a college teacher.

If, like Keating, letter carriers were relatively fortunate compared to many other workers, the Depression nonetheless affected them in very significant and often devastating ways. As the Depression deepened, a drive to slash the wages of all government employees gained momentum, grew steadily, and culminated in Hoover's



Economy Act of 1932. This law authorized the first wage reductions in the history of the federal service: one month's furlough per year for every government employee. For letter carriers, this meant an $8\frac{1}{3}$ percent decrease in wages.

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in late 1932 only aggravated the situation for letter carriers. Most people remember Roosevelt as a president who tried to alleviate widespread suffering and revive the American economy through "New Deal" legislation. However, on the campaign trail in 1932, he espoused a far different political philosophy. Roosevelt had campaigned against Hoover on a platform of government economy, and he even had gone so far as to promise to cut government spending to the bone and balance the national budget—campaign promises that did not bode well for any government worker. True to his

UNIFORM ALLOWANCE



When free city delivery was established in 1863, the first letter carriers were not required to wear uniforms. Five years later, however, Congress authorized the use of uniforms and Postmaster General Alexander W. Randall issued an order prescribing a mandatory uniform for letter carriers:

A single-breasted Sack Coat ... with five brass buttons ... pants of same material with fine broadcloth stripe one half inch wide down each leg...

In those early days, letter carriers were forced to pay for their own uniforms, a large expense considering their meager salaries. And while uniform styles have changed with the times, the burden of purchasing uniforms remained with letter carriers for another 86 years. Finally, in 1954, Congress passed a Uniform Allowance Act, providing letter carriers with \$100 per year to purchase their uniforms. Since the advent of collective bargaining in 1971, the union has negotiated the amount of the allowance. As a result, the allowance has increased over the years in an effort to keep pace with rising uniform costs and the larger selection of approved items carriers are authorized to wear.

word, on March 20, 1933—just 16 days after taking office—Roosevelt replaced Hoover's furloughs with a straight 15 percent salary cut. This drastic cut, combined with a subsequent nine-day furlough for postal workers, reduced letter carriers' wages to their 1916 level.

What effect did these reductions have on letter carriers and their families? A few quotations from a questionnaire the NALC sent out to its members in 1933 illustrate some of the hardship:

Had to call the doctor last month on account of sickness and he claims all the children [7] are undernourished and [yet] I am spending all my salary on food and the barest of necessities.

I certainly hope we get back to full pay very soon, for I for one cannot hold out much longer. The Federal man has been about the only one with a job the past two years and all his relations and friends look to him for assistance. I do not believe there is a man in our office that is not helping friends and relatives...

Unless some relief is given, we will be forced to take our boys out of school.

For village carriers, whose pay was \$750 a year less than city carriers, life was even harder:

My wife lost her job clerking in a store for \$12 per week, because the public thought that both of us were not entitled to a job. Within the last year my father and sister have lost their jobs and that puts three more for me to feed, clothe and keep warm.

Hardest hit by the Depression, however, were substitute carriers. City subs earned 65 cents an hour and village subs earned as little as 50 cents an hour—meager wages even before the 15 percent wage reduction. The steep decline in postal business forced the Department to reduce deliveries and other services, making it impossible for subs to work enough hours to survive. For example, in many large city offices substitutes earned as little as \$6 a week. Finally, Hoover's Economy Act of 1932 prohibited the filling of most regular vacancies in the postal service—a cruel and devastating setback for subs whose very livelihoods were dependent upon advancement.

Deeply concerned about the plight of the subs, regular carriers came to their assistance. In Oklahoma City, regular letter carriers announced their willingness to take leave without pay, and in Glendale, California, they agreed to go on vacation—in both cases so that subs would have some work. The Glendale scribe wrote in a 1934 *Postal Record*:

Regular carriers are not having such a good time or making too much, but we are not starving and we should be willing to give a day's work per month to aid a brother.

In Wichita, Kansas, the branch formed a special sub-relief organization to supply funds to needy subs and their families.

Substitutes tried to help themselves, too. A committee of subs from Cleveland, Ohio, traveled to Washington in 1933 to present their plight to the Roosevelt Administration. Subs in several large cities joined with other substitute postal workers to form their own organization, the National Association of Substitute Postal Employees, because they thought the established unions were neglecting their problems. Although the claim was not true, their impatience with the NALC's and other postal unions' progress was understandable. Desperate and undoubtedly influenced by the large number of strikes and demonstrations all across America, these subs decided to voice their complaints. They marched on Washington, DC in 1934 demanding a "job for every substitute."

In the face of the government's massive attack on their members' livelihoods, NALC President Edward J. Gainor and National Secretary Michael T. Finnan lobbied continuously for wage restoration for all government workers and relief for substitutes. In a 1934 "Memorial to

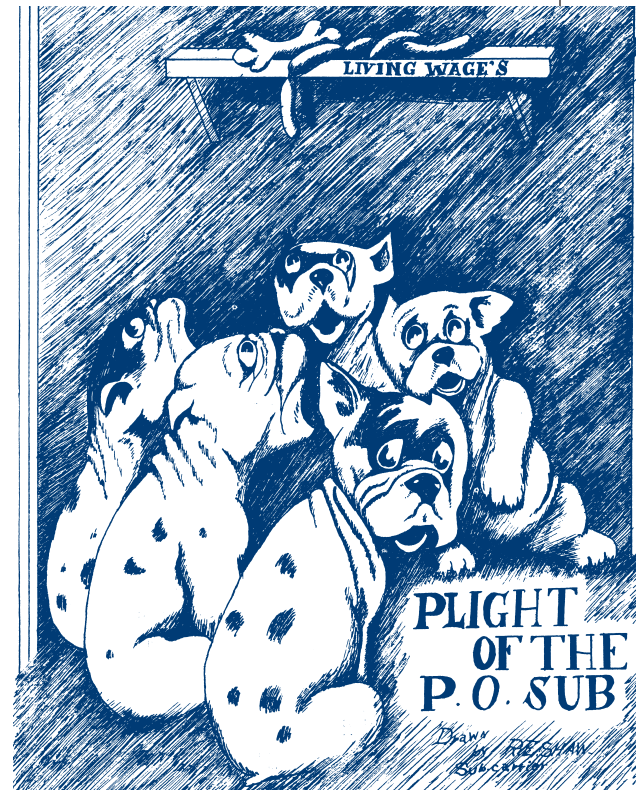
Congress," the NALC presented impressive documentation that carriers' wages were already inadequate before the wage reductions, and that the hardship caused by the reductions far outweighed any possible benefits. The wage reductions, the NALC further argued, were having no appreciable effect on balancing the budget.

Ultimately, yet unintentionally, the Roosevelt administration aided the NALC in its fight for pay restoration. During 1933 and 1934 Roosevelt was urging civilian employers to maintain high wages and shorten the working hours of their employees to get the economy moving again. At the same time the administration insisted on continuing the 15 percent salary reduction for all government employees. The NALC called this policy "insincere and inconsistent." A letter carrier highlighted the contradiction in a 1934 *Postal Record*:

Is the government going to have one policy for industry and another for their own employees? How long can the administration urge industry to increase wages and shorten hours and force their own employees to do the opposite? What will be the fate of the fight for wage restoration?

The NALC and other postal and federal organizations finally won the fight. The wages of all government employees were completely restored by April 1935. And by the end of the decade, substitute carriers obtained some relief when a bill giving them their

The 15 percent salary cut, combined with a subsequent nine-day furlough for postal workers, reduced letter carriers' wages to their 1916 level.



THE MAILMAN

*He goes around from house to house
And rings the bell or knocks
When there is something to be slipped
Inside the letter box.*

*His pouch is filled with messages
Of happiness and cheer
And also those that draw a frown
Or possibly a tear.*

*He brings the blanks for income tax
And statements by the score,
As well as word from Uncle Sam
That it's time to go to war.*

*He carries papers, magazines,
And ads of every sort,
Besides the V-mail letters from
The farthest foreign port.*

*He is the messenger of love,
Surprise and tragedy,
He is the constant carrier
Of time and memory.*

*So while I'm over here fighting
And going through all this hell,
You just keep on delivering letters
To Mrs. Paul L.*

—S/Sgt. Paul L. Scheliam



National Postal Museum Library

first annual and sick leave benefits was passed on July 18, 1939.

A POWER STRUGGLE EMERGES

For the American labor movement, the Great Depression was a period of turmoil and change. At the beginning, the number of union members plunged as more and more workers joined the ranks of the unemployed. By 1933, however, hundreds of thousands of industrial workers were knocking at the doors of AFL unions seeking the benefits of organization. Yet many AFL unions were unable or unwilling to let them in. Then, in the middle of the decade, a group of unions committed to organizing industrial workers bolted from the AFL to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). These CIO unions quickly mounted successful organizing campaigns in auto, steel and other mass production industries.

In contrast, the NALC maintained its affiliation with the AFL and survived the period largely insulated from the cross-currents that buffeted many other unions. This is not to say, however, that the leadership of the NALC came out of this experi-

ence unscathed. For Edward J. Gainor, president of the NALC since 1914, the Great Depression precipitated the beginning of the end of his administration.

Although trouble for Gainor and other officers of the NALC did not become serious until 1938, signs of discontent within the membership were evident earlier. In 1933, a small number of carriers—unhappy with the wage reductions—began to criticize the union leadership in *The Postal Record*, and the NALC convention in Atlantic City that year was combative.

Restoration of wages in 1935, however, helped mollify some of the discontented members. Then, in the late 1930s, as war broke out in Europe and the cost of living began to rise, letter carriers grew more and more dissatisfied with their 1925 wages. Not surprisingly, a call for new leadership and more militant tactics at the national level was heard.

The first overt step in the power struggle between the established leadership—the “Old Guard,” as they were called—and younger, more militant members within the NALC was ironically taken in President Gainor’s home state of Indiana. In 1938, Indianapolis Branch 39 and 27 other branches petitioned for a national referendum to amend the NALC Constitution. The so-called Hoosier Amendment, which called for the election of national officers by direct mail balloting rather than by convention delegates, was aimed directly at the Old Guard. Seventy-two percent of the membership voted in the referendum, and the proposed amendment was defeated on April 15,

1939 by a 3½-to-1 majority. Gainor had won the first round.

The scene of the next stage in the struggle for power was the NALC's Golden Anniversary Convention, held in the city of its birth, Milwaukee, on September 4, 1939. From the moment the convention opened, tension filled the air. The "Hoosier Amendment" may have been defeated five months earlier, but the incident was not forgotten by Gainor or the delegates in attendance. In addition, Great Britain and France had declared war on Germany the day before the convention opened—a sobering event which, as one can imagine, increased delegates' anxiety.

The convention opened on an uproarious note when a rowdy group of letter carriers who were not official delegates attempted to speak. A cross-fire of cheers and calls to "throw them out!" immediately erupted. Only after President Gainor threatened to have the police haul the dissidents from the room was the convention able to continue with its normal business.

The afternoon of the third day, when the Committee of Resolutions read Resolution 70 to the delegates, was the moment of highest drama. Resolution 70 proposed to amend the

NALC Constitution to prohibit any national officer from standing for reelection upon reaching the age of 65. If adopted, the resolution would have blocked four of the top NALC officers, including Gainor, from running for office in 1941. The convention floor exploded into an uproar over this proposal, and after a noisy and often acrimonious debate, a voice vote defeated Resolution 70. Gainor had once again prevailed.

His troubles, however, did not end on that tumultuous afternoon in 1939. In the months following the convention, there was no progress on the legislative front, and dissatisfaction within the rank and file was rampant. Fourteen years without a wage increase was far too long. Then, as the 1941 convention approached, Gainor chose to run for re-election, instead of retiring as many people hoped he would do. There was a feeling that the organization was reaching a point of crisis, and a way out had to be found.

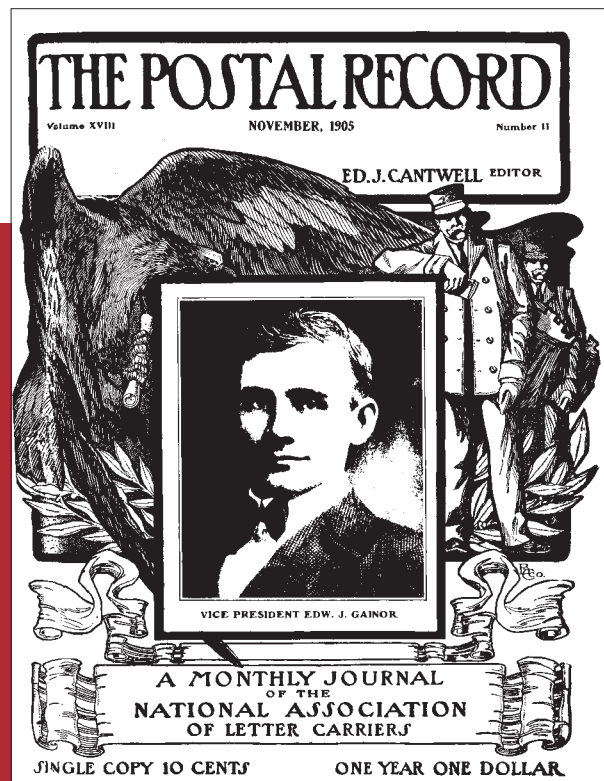
Two key events then happened back-to-back. In December 1940, more than 200 branches, led by Branch 1 in

EDWARD GAINOR

FATHER OF THE SHORTER WORK WEEK

Edward Gainor, NALC president from 1914 through 1941, led the long struggle to reduce letter carriers' hours of work from 48 to 40 hours. His eventual success earned him tribute as the "Father of the Shorter Work Week."

Under Gainor's leadership, the NALC secured legislation in 1931 creating a 44-hour work week for carriers, and then a 40-hour week in 1935. Gainor also brought his campaign for shorter working hours to all American workers as vice president of the American Federation of Labor.



Detroit, signed a petition for a referendum to amend the NALC Constitution. The amendment—another version of Resolution 70—provided that no one over 65 could run for national office. One month later, William C. Doherty of Cincinnati's Branch 43, a young member of the Executive Board, chose to make his move. At the semi-annual meeting of the National Executive Board in January 1941, Doherty announced that he was running for president of the NALC. Six of the 21 members of the Board walked out of the room with him, joining the Doherty team.

The next few months were difficult ones for the NALC as the referendum became the battle ground on which the Gainor and Doherty forces fought. Anyone who was for the amendment was against Gainor, and vice versa. There was no middle ground. A carrier from Grand Rapids, Michigan, illustrated the point with his partisan remarks in the February 1941 *Postal Record*:

Let us not try to straddle the fence. Either you are for this dastardly piece of legislation or you are against this vicious attack against our national officers.

On April 5, 1941, the power struggle effectively ended. With almost 90 percent of the members voting, the amendment won by an extremely narrow margin: 26,583 to 23,838. And on September 6, 1941, with no one opposing him, William C. Doherty was elected president of the NALC at the Los Angeles convention.

THE NALC MOBILIZES

Sixteen years without a pay raise—that was the situation letter carriers faced in 1941 and that was why they elected William C. Doherty. Although Congress had arbitrarily slashed their wages during the Great Depression, the cost of living had

declined and carriers were financially better off than many other workers. But the job that had seemed enviable during the Depression once again became undesirable as the economy revived. By 1941, when the economy was expanding, city letter carriers were earning a maximum of \$2,100 while workers in shipyards and other defense industries were now making two to three times more, and many other workers were also earning good wages. Nonetheless, the government greeted letter carriers' requests for a pay increase with stoical indifference. In response, letter carriers were more than frustrated—they were angry at being treated like second-class citizens by their employer, the U.S. Government. A Michigan carrier articulated the majority's feelings in *The Postal Record* when he wrote:

They all talk about the wonderful work the postal employees are doing all over the country, but we have heard that, for... years. That don't help us to buy our food and clothing, that's just a lot of water over the dam; what we want is a raise right now.

In response to this treatment, delegates to the 1941 convention instructed Bill Doherty and the rest of the officers to obtain a \$900 increase, pushing top letter carrier wages to \$3,000 a year. But before Doherty could initiate a major salary campaign, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and America entered World War II. In the next six to eight months, the entire nation mobilized to support the war effort.

Over 15,000 letter carriers joined the armed services to fight for their country. The rest continued to carry the nation's mail, as essential a job in war as in peace. Temporary replacements were sought to fill vacancies, but with wages so low it was difficult to find workers. Many carriers simply absorbed their absent co-workers' duties. In addition, postal employees



were asked to perform extra wartime tasks, such as the distribution of over 120,000,000 ration books. Letter carriers worked long and hard during World War II and they did so willingly, with no complaints, except one: They were having an extremely difficult time feeding their families on 1925 wages.

In 1942, with mobilization of the country's war resources well underway, the young, aggressive Bill Doherty began a campaign for a temporary wartime bonus of \$300 a year. This salary drive was the first in a series of electrifying campaigns that channeled the anger of the membership into a single voice demanding justice.

Doherty's leadership was dynamic and innovative. He seized the offensive immediately. On Saturday night, August 8, 1942, in a "Labor for Victory" broadcast sponsored by the American Federation of Labor, Bill Doherty carried the NALC's message directly to the American people:

G.I. MAILMAN —Louis J. Sanker

*He can march! What of it? The tramp of his feet
Back home had been wearing a trail in the street.
His shoulders that square now to pull off his pack
Had sagged to a load for many years back.
He had hurried along with a militant stride,
for a uniform always was part of his hide—
And the service he gave repaid him in pride.*

*Heat was a hammer, and cold was a claw;
Wind was a razor rasping him raw;
And rain was a deluge drowning desire...
But, stung by the storm, he sheltered his fire;
Elbowed the wind, taunted the rain,
Derided discomfort, made light of his pain—
For a duty well-done was adequate gain.*

*The folks he had served might have measured his worth:
He solaced in death, was joyous in birth;
Kept tight the courage of mother and dad,
Till he knocked on the door with word from the lad.
He treasured their thanks, took pride in their praise—
But it's strange that nobody thought of a raise,
For nigh twenty years never thought of a raise.*



Convention delegates parade in Denver during the 1943 convention.

I think I should explain that the NALC is different from most other unions. We can't strike. In fact, we have no desire to strike, even when conditions are as tough as they are now. That's because the letter carriers are working for Uncle Sam and for you, the people of the United States.... You, the people of the United States, are our boss. We know you want to treat us right. That's why we hate to remind you that you have fallen down on us.

After explaining the dire financial circumstances letter carriers were in, Doherty made his pitch:

I'm speaking tonight to the people who live on every city street and country road in America. I'm speaking to you for the letter carrier who comes your way every day. Your letter carrier has asked me to enlist your help. All you have to do is to write a letter or post-card to your Congressmen.

Local NALC branches repeated and expanded on the same message in broadcasts from their community radio stations. Letter carriers and

women in the National Ladies Auxiliary sent letters to their congressional representatives, community newspapers and labor newspapers, and also sought endorsements from state and central bodies of the AFL. Finally, on April 9, 1943, the salary campaign achieved success, as letter carriers received a \$300-a-year wartime bonus, effective until June 30, 1945.

Bill Doherty, however, did not stop. The wartime bonus was only a short-term solution to an 18-year-old problem. In 1944, he called for another salary campaign to obtain a permanent \$400-a-year pay increase. Needing little prodding from national headquarters, letter carriers responded enthusiastically to his call in a widespread outburst of local actions. In fact, Doherty derived many of his ideas directly from the membership. After Chicago's Branch 11 and a number of branches held large salary rallies, he called for a National Salary Rally Week during October 22-28,



National Postal Museum Library

1944. When carriers from Branch 36 in New York distributed tens of thousands of handbills after work hours to educate the public on the salary issue, the handbill was published in *The Postal Record* and Doherty encouraged other branches to take similar action. No stone was left unturned in this long, arduous, and well-organized campaign. And once again, Doherty and the carriers were victorious: On July 6, 1945, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill giving letter carriers their first permanent pay increase in 20 years.

This victory, important as it was, brought the top salary of letter carriers to only \$2,500—still an inadequate wage and still short of the 1941 NALC convention mandate for a \$900 increase.

On August 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered and the war ended. Bill Doherty again seized the initiative by arguing that the war could no longer be used by Congress as an excuse for inaction. On August 29—just six weeks after the last pay increase—he called for another campaign to raise wages. His dramatic strategy paid off. With Congress now able to direct its attention to domestic matters, the salary bill sailed through both Houses, and on May 21, 1946 President Truman approved another \$400 a year increase for letter carriers.

Strengthened by these successes, Doherty led the NALC to even greater victories in the immediate post-war years. The union secured passage of 10 important pieces of legislation between 1946 and 1948, including two more pay increases for city carriers. And one of the original objectives of the NALC—equalization of wages for all letter carriers—was finally achieved on October 29, 1949, when a law abolishing village delivery service was enacted, giving city delivery status to all village carriers. For the first

time since July 1, 1863, when 449 modern carriers began to walk the streets of America, city delivery carriers received the same wages regardless of the size of the community in which they worked.

Naturally, letter carriers were ecstatic over their legislative victories. By the end of the 1940s, the job of a letter carrier was beginning to compare favorably with jobs in private industry. Letter carriers' anger and frustration over past congressional delays and inaction dissolved with each victory. Not surprisingly, however, the spectacular campaigns conducted by the NALC antagonized some of the population. An article entitled "Postman Voodoo" in the October 10, 1949 issue of *Newsweek* had this to say:

Congress suffers from a strange occupational ailment. Postmanitis is marked by a high fever and a fluttery stomach; although not fatal, it nevertheless is terrifying. It recurs whenever the legislators start thinking about what might conceivably happen if they ever did anything to make the nation's mail carriers angry. The only cure for it, as far as Congress knows, is simply to vote for everything the postal employees' lobby wants.

These attacks did not faze Bill Doherty. His position was unassailable: Since the NALC was prohibited from collective bargaining and denied the power to strike by its employer, the Congress of the United States, it was the responsibility of Congress to listen and respond to the NALC's petitions. The NALC was not a pressure or special interest group—it was a union.

For the first time since July 1, 1863, when 449 modern carriers began to walk the streets of America, city delivery carriers received the same wages regardless of the size of the community in which they worked.



1950-1960

APRIL IS THE CRUELEST MONTH

April 18, 1950 was a turning point in the history of both letter carriers and the NALC. It was a day that carriers of the time would never forget—a day that in many ways foreshadowed the upheaval of March 1970 and, by triggering the union's outrage and reaction, demonstrated that the NALC was, as had been true from its founding, committed to providing the best possible mail service for the public.

When President Truman appointed Jesse Donaldson postmaster general in 1947, rank-and-file letter carriers were pleased. A career man, Donaldson had once carried the mail. He, if anyone, would understand their problems and treat them fairly. But despite their hopes, Donaldson would deeply disappoint the nation's letter carriers.

The April 18 incident was set in motion earlier when Congress and the Bureau of the Budget slashed Post Office Department funds to the point where Donaldson did not have enough money to operate the service. Instead of fighting the cuts and enlisting the lobbying support of the NALC and other postal unions, Donaldson meekly accepted the reductions. Then, on April 18, 1950, without consulting the postal unions or Congress, Donaldson issued an order that still affects letter carriers and the public today. He reduced residential mail deliveries to once a day and most business mail deliveries to twice a day, while also severely curtailing many other postal services such as street collections, window service and parcel post deliveries. Donaldson's objective was to save the Department over \$80 million.

To today's letter carrier—long accustomed to once-a-day mail delivery—Donaldson's order may seem unremarkable. But for letter carriers in 1950, the order was equivalent to a stab in the back, or—as a carrier in Salt Lake City described it—“the carrier service has been hit below the belt.” From the very beginning of their history, letter carriers have taken deep pride in providing first-rate mail service to the American public. In fact, when letter carriers founded the NALC in 1889, they expressed two reasons for organizing a union: mutual benefit and “the good of the public service.”

The infamous order of April 18, 1950 also permanently changed the job of letter carriers and the nature of their work day. Prior to this order, a

letter carrier would return to the station after the morning delivery, take an hour or hour and a half break to eat and rest, and then sort mail before embarking on the second delivery. The one-trip delivery order forced carriers—for the first time in their history—to remain on the street constantly from the time they left the office until the end of the work day. In addition, lunch breaks were reduced to 30 minutes.

Although the order evoked a deluge of protests from the NALC, other postal employees, the public, and the press, letter carriers were especially indignant. Suddenly they found themselves eating their lunches on street curbs and next to or in collection boxes in all kinds of weather. Restroom facilities also became a major problem.

Donaldson's April 18 order delayed the mail of soldiers fighting in South Korea.

AP Wide World Photos, Inc.





New York City letter carriers protest Donaldson's April 18, 1950 order slashing service.

St. Petersburg Times

These unpleasant new predicaments aggravated the more serious hardships of the order: longer routes, some lengthened by as much as one-third; heavier loads; and lost work opportunities for substitutes. Last, but not least, it was the letter carrier who bore the brunt of the public's disgruntlement over the decline in service.

Under the leadership of Bill Doherty and Secretary Jerome Keating, the NALC vigorously campaigned for the restoration of service. Doherty accused Donaldson of "raping the postal service" and immediately marshaled the forces of the NALC to push Donaldson to rescind the order. The union argued that Donaldson's order—more drastic than any issued in two World Wars or the Great Depression—was a hysterical reaction to a manageable and common problem faced by previous postal administrations. Doherty and Keating decried the "public-be-damned" attitude of Donaldson, and they called upon the American people to decide the issue. But before the order could be rescinded, the Korean War broke out in June 1950, and any further action on the issue was suspended.

Throughout the decade, the NALC continued to fight for restoration of services. The longer routes, heavier work loads and deteriorating working conditions were seriously affecting the health and morale of its members. Disability rates, deaths and early retirement had increased markedly. Doherty appealed to the nation's sense of humanity in June 1952:





Unless some higher authority steps in and re-establishes humane working conditions in the Postal Service, every post office in the nation will be no more than a tombstone for those letter carriers who went down under the killing pace of the curtailment order.

In that same year, more than 1,500 letter carriers in New York City held a mass meeting to protest the 1950 service cuts and further curtailments ordered in 1952. These carriers sent a telegram to President Truman demanding Donaldson's dismissal.

But the NALC's fervent protests were all in vain. The service curtailments of 1950 were never restored and the issue was never seriously debated in Congress.

LET THEM EAT CAKE

Although working conditions declined drastically after the service curtailments of 1950, from merely a dollars-and-cents point of view, the job of a letter carrier was considered a good one in 1952. A \$400-a-year pay increase in 1951 pushed carriers' wages to a scale between \$3,270 and \$4,070—a direct result of intensive salary campaigns and a sympathetic Congress. By 1952, letter carriers had caught up to workers with similar jobs in the private sector and were finally earning a living wage.

But 1952 was an election year, and letter carriers had no intention of voting away their recent, hard-earned



Top: Dedication ceremony for the National Headquarters Building on August 30, 1952. Far right: The building in 2013.



NALC HEADQUARTERS

NALC's efforts to create a permanent home for the union began as early as 1925, but no serious action was taken until 1944 when dues money was earmarked for a Building Fund. To help the project become a reality, individual members, branches and auxiliaries voluntarily gave thousands of dollars to the Fund. The NALC honored Fred B. Hutchings of Branch 134, Syracuse, New York, for bequeathing the largest individual contribution, more than \$35,000, by naming the new building's meeting hall after him.

Construction on the NALC Building at 100 Indiana Avenue, NW, in Washington began in late 1950, and the building was dedicated on August 30, 1952, before 3,000 people at a ceremony at the foot of Capitol Hill. Carriers from all over the United States came to celebrate the occasion with over 600 people arriving on a special train from Brooklyn, and others by car, train and plane. Seven letter carrier bands traveled to the dedication from as far away as Salt Lake City and Seattle, and American Federation of Labor leaders William Green

and George Meany spoke to the assembled crowd as did legendary Postmaster General James A. Farley.

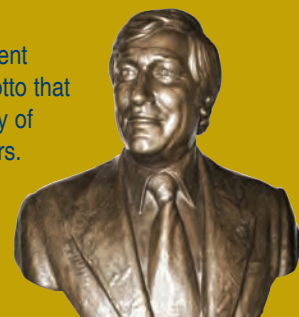
The new eight-story building provided the union with sufficient space not only for the union's headquarters operation, but also to move the Mutual Benefit Association's headquarters from Nashville and the National Sick Benefit Association from Boston and include the NALC Hospital Plan—now the NALC Health Benefit Plan. The growth of the Health Plan was a major factor in motivating the union in 1964 to add an eight-story annex to the original building, although the building's added space could not contain the explosion of the NALC Health Benefit Plan which moved to the northern Virginia suburbs in 1972.

Since the building had more space than NALC required at the outset, the union was able to rent to other unions and organizations, with the income helping to cover mortgage payments, critically important in an era when the union was strapped for cash. Today, with the building owned free and clear, rental income from those floors occu-

pies by tenants goes toward maintenance and upgrades of mechanical systems.

Named the Vincent R. Sombrotto Building by the unanimous decision of the delegates to the 2006 convention in honor of the union's sixteenth national president, the building continues to meet the union's needs after more than six decades, albeit with occasional renovations and remodeling. Moreover, the building's location, only a stone's throw from the United States Capitol, has carried considerable prestige over the years while enabling the union's officers and members to travel a short and direct route when advancing the union's legislative interests.

The bust of President Vincent R. Sombrotto that resides in the lobby of NALC Headquarters.





gains. So, on Labor Day 1952, when Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican candidate for president, addressed the NALC convention in New York City, delegates listened carefully to his words. Traditionally, every change in administration in Washington, DC has generated speculation and some apprehension among government workers. But in a spirit of friendliness, Eisenhower made this pledge:

If I have ... the responsibility of filling the highest post in the land, I am going to have one ambition: that, at the end of those four years, every working man and woman in the United States would say, "He was fair."

In the same address, he uttered a promise which letter carriers would long remember:

I want to repeat to the full convention what I promised and the request that I made to your president ... only a couple of weeks ago. I said to him, "Mr. Doherty, if I have this grave responsibility, I request that, if ever you find anything coming up that you believe is damaging the Postal Service or is unfair to any member ... you bring that to me, and I promise you in advance you won't sit on the doorstep anytime to get to me."

But eight years later when Eisenhower concluded his second term as president, letter carriers were bitter and sullen; their hope of maintaining economic equality with other workers had vanished. Why? What happened in those eight years?

After Ike's resounding victory in the election of 1952, he appointed Arthur E. Summerfield to the position of postmaster general. A businessman, Summerfield was shocked at the antiquated practices that had turned his new charge—the Post Office Department—into an administrative nightmare. During his first 18 months on the job, he completely overhauled the Department, instituting modern business methods and decentralizing it into 15 regions. These brilliant accomplishments, however, were marred by Summerfield's insensitivity to the needs of postal employees and his indifference to the concerns of the NALC and other postal unions. Determined to run the Department at a profit, Summerfield zealously pursued a strategy of keeping postal salaries as low as possible.

The battle line between the NALC and

NALC President Bill Doherty introduces Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican candidate for president, to convention delegates in 1952.



"I'm sorry you didn't get as much of a raise as you expected, Mr. Figby ... Maybe they'll issue a stamp commemorating you..."
 George Lichty & Chicago Sun-Times Syndicate

The Wonderful Wizards of Washington



McNaught Syndication

Summerfield was drawn in 1954 when Summerfield tried to push a reclassification and salary plan through Congress. The plan, based on a study of postal pay structure which Summerfield had commissioned Fry Associates, a business consulting firm, to write, would have radically altered the service's entire classification system. In addition, the plan would have raised letter carriers' wages an average of \$100 a year—although some carriers would only have received \$10—while raising some supervisors' salaries by as much as \$5,000. The NALC was outraged at Summerfield's insulting offer of such a pittance to carriers, who had not received a pay increase in three years. But in many ways, the NALC was even more outraged that

there had been absolutely no prior discussion or consultation with the union about the plan.

The Lloyd-LaFollette Act of 1912, which recognized letter carriers' right to join a union, did not require the

Department to consult with or recognize the NALC, even though the union had long represented over 90 percent of working city delivery carriers. This limitation in the law did not seem significant in 1912. But by 1950, when the NALC had not been consulted or even warned of Donaldson's one-a-day delivery order, the letter carriers bristled. The weakness of Lloyd-LaFollette stared them in the face. The Summerfield administration, with its "daddy-knows-best" attitude, intensified the NALC's dissatisfaction with the status quo. Union recognition and a labor-management relations bill became a new rallying cry—at the very same time carriers were fighting tooth and nail for economic justice.

In 1954, Congress responded to NALC's call for economic justice. After the Fry Associates' plan died in committee, Congress passed a more realistic and fairer postal pay bill by landslide majorities—352-29 in the House and 69-4 in the Senate. The bill, however, stopped dead in its tracks in the summer of 1954, for Eisenhower, just as Calvin Coolidge had done in 1924, vetoed the pay bill.

The veto, a bitter pill for letter carriers to swallow, was only the beginning of Eisenhower's quiet assault on



Washington, DC letter carrier entering church to pray for an increase in salary in 1957.



the welfare of postal workers. One year later, on May 9, 1955, the president vetoed another pay raise for postal workers. Finally, in June 1955, a pay bill was signed into law—letter carriers' first pay increase in four years. Critical as the increase was, it did not pacify rank-and-file carriers who were shocked at the administration's intense opposition. In August 1956, a letter carrier in Worcester, Massachusetts hinted of rebellion:

Are we not entitled to partake of the American way of life? We are sick of sympathy. If only the letter carrier would realize the dormant power in his ranks. We never would accept the answer: "They have no bread? Then let them eat cake."

Three months later, *The Postal Record* reported that "the average American family" earned \$5,520 a year before taxes in 1955 while the average letter carrier earned \$4,400—\$1,120 a year less. Yet, the 1956 Republican platform stated: "Good times in America have reached a breadth and depth never known by any nation."

On August 1, 1957, letter carriers tried the unusual in their fight for better pay. The method: prayer. Tens of thousands of letter carriers throughout

the nation paused from their daily tasks to pray for a salary increase. In hundreds of cities, clergymen appeared at the local post office early in the morning to conduct a short service.

In spite of this dramatic act of faith, Summerfield and Eisenhower were unmoved. Another postal pay bill, approved by Congress, was vetoed by Eisenhower in September 1957. And not only did Eisenhower veto it, but he resorted to the pocket veto technique to kill it—waiting until members of Congress had gone home before announcing his veto decision. The Ladies Auxiliary of Branch 235 sent a "Death Notice" to *The Postal Record*. Edged in black, it captured the bitterness of the times:

Cause of Death: President Eisenhower. Attempting to survive are the wives, mothers and children of postal workers.

At the same time, *U. S. News and World Report* reported that while the wages of workers in private industry had increased between \$20 and \$36 a week in the previous five years, letter carriers' wages had increased by a mere \$5.50.

Dissatisfaction welled up in the ranks of carriers. Although Eisenhower



A Washington, DC letter carrier, Robert S. Bancroft, was used as a model for this 1955 certified mail stamp.

NALC HEALTH BENEFIT PLAN

During the early decades of the 20th century, postal employees fought for and obtained some, but not all, of the employment benefits received by workers in more enlightened segments of the private sector. By 1920, the government had adopted workers' compensation, sick leave and a retirement system—but it stubbornly resisted an employer-sponsored health insurance plan for another 39 years.

To solve the problem of meeting medical expenses on a letter carrier's salary, the NALC founded a hospitalization and surgical plan for its members in 1950. The plan operated for nine years before the U.S. Government, after a hard-fought legislative struggle, finally agreed to establish an employer-sponsored health insurance plan for all federal workers. The Federal Employees' Health Benefits Act of 1959 opened the way for the NALC to offer a new plan with greatly expanded coverage of medical costs. Following an enrollment period during which Plan enrollment shot up from 32,000 to more than 101,000, the new NALC Health Benefit Plan began operations on July 1, 1960.

The Plan has been enormously successful since its founding and today is one of the most highly rated plans in the federal program, offering a range of options providing excellent medical, surgical, hospital and prescription drug coverage to letter carriers, other postal employees, federal workers and dependents. Moreover, due to NALC's success at the bargaining table, the Postal Service pays most of the premium cost for health coverage for letter carriers and their families.

Headquartered in Ashburn, Virginia, outside of Washington, DC, the Plan is administered by a large professional staff led by elected union officers directly accountable to NALC members.



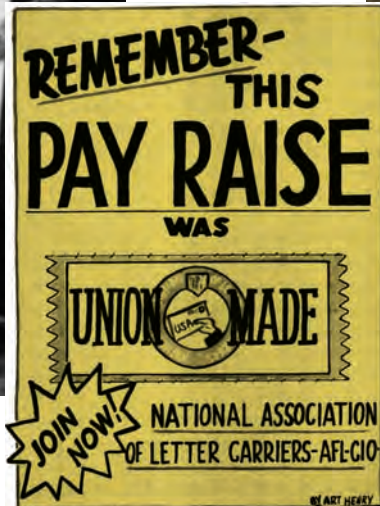
signed into law a pay raise on May 27, 1959, it did little to quell the mounting resentment. Some carriers vented their anger at the union and its officers and either quit paying dues or threatened to quit the union.

In response, an understanding Milwaukee, Wisconsin letter carrier tried to redirect the disaffected carriers' frustration:

No matter what you believe, neither Congress, nor anyone else, is going to enact or even introduce legislation for your benefit, if your concentrated action is not in evidence. There simply is no Santa Claus.

Other carriers began to question the no-strike provision of the Lloyd-LaFollette Act and later legislation. Tentative whisperings were heard of work stoppages, mass sick-outs, and more aggressive action.

By 1960, letter carriers were having serious financial difficulties. Many carriers worked two jobs to support their families, and their wives often were forced to work to supplement carriers' meager income. A substantial number of letter carriers could not even qualify for an FHA loan to buy a home. A letter carrier from Paducah, Kentucky asked the members in February of 1960:

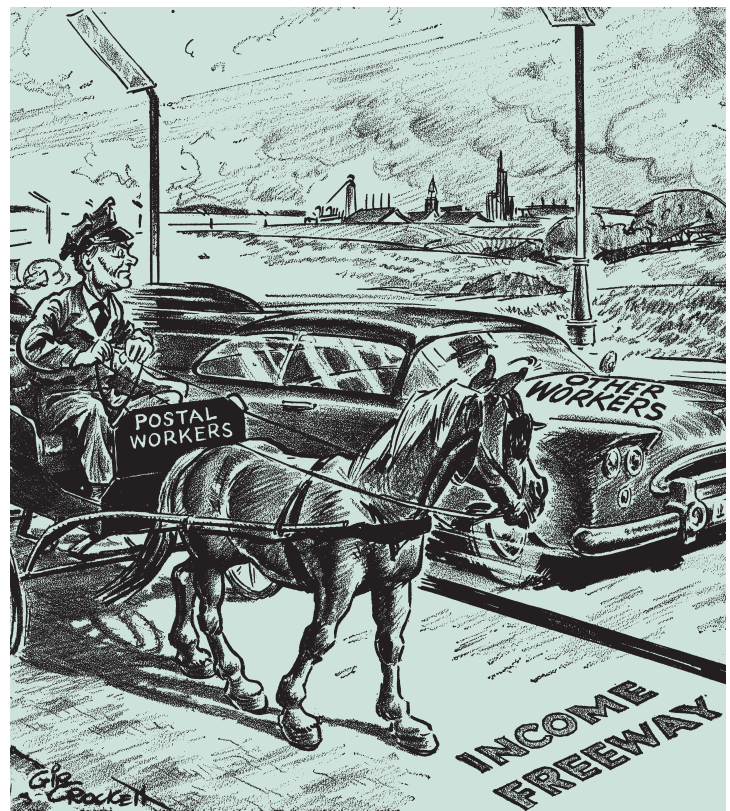


Letter carriers in action—
Crusade for Economic Equality.

*How many of us have any change in our pockets a couple of days after pay day?
Are we too proud to admit our poverty?*

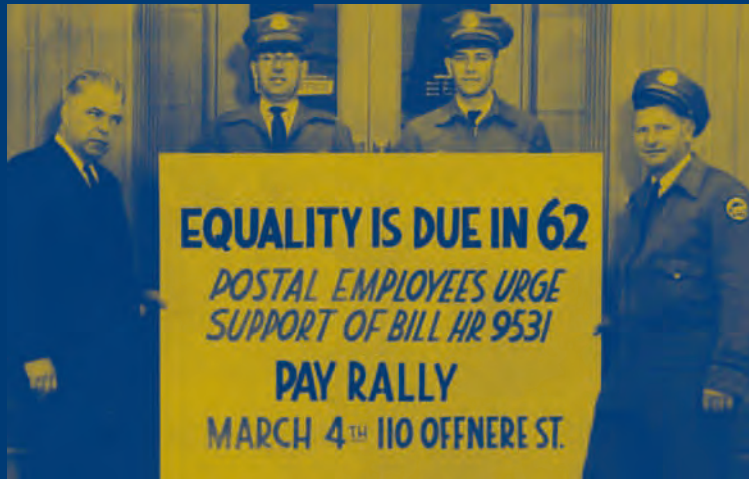
Deeply affected by these outcries of pain and suffering, Bill Doherty and Jerome Keating led one of the most dynamic salary campaigns in the NALC's history in early 1960. The campaign, called "Crusade for Economic Equality," was aggressively fought, and Congress responded by passing a pay bill in June. But Eisenhower, in his last year as president, vetoed the legislation. His veto message denounced the "disturbing" and "shocking" lobbying activities of the NALC and other postal unions. Undaunted by Eisenhower's scathing criticism, the NALC lobbied fiercely for a veto override and was victorious. On July 1, 1960, Congress overwhelmingly overrode the veto—one of only two of the 169 Eisenhower vetoes to be overridden in eight years.

The Eisenhower era ended in January 1961, when John F. Kennedy assumed the presidency. Letter carriers of the time, then hopelessly behind the economic parade, would never forget the friendly "Ike" who vetoed four pay raises.



1961-1969

THE RIGHT TO REPRESENT LETTER CARRIERS



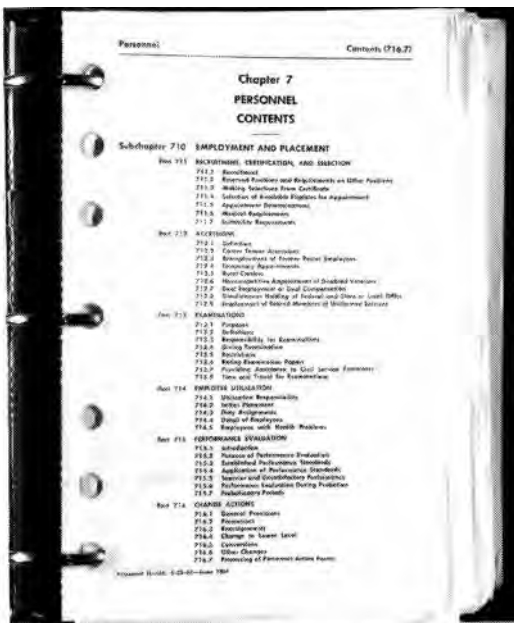
When President-elect John F. Kennedy appointed J. Edward Day postmaster general in 1961, a reporter asked Kennedy whether Day intended to restore twice-a-day delivery. Kennedy, known for his wit and having just had a letter take eight days to reach Boston, replied that he hoped Day “would be able to restore once-a-day delivery!”

Although twice-a-day delivery was not reinstated by Postmaster General Day, progress during the Kennedy Administration was achieved on an entirely different front—one directly affecting letter carriers and their union.

Labor-management relations in the Post Office Department had reached a new low by 1960. Subject to the whims of local and regional supervision, letter carriers were almost totally without rights and protections. The 1912 Lloyd-LaFollette Act required that employees be given notice of any proposed adverse action and be allowed reasonable time to file an answer to charges. But workers had no right to a hearing or to representation. The NALC itself had no representational rights on the workroom floor, there was no collective bargaining agreement between the union and the Department spelling out the rights and obligations of *both* parties, and there was no grievance procedure through which the union could challenge management’s actions. The only written document was the *Postal Manual*, which a carrier from Stamford, Connecticut described in 1961:

P ... is for porous—full of loopholes
O ... is for omnipotence—unlimited power
S ... is for sovereign or supreme power
T ... is for tease or taunt—they make provisions for you in one paragraph and take them away in the next
A ... is for archaic, old-fashioned and antiquated
L ... is for latitude—they allow themselves plenty of it
M ... is for mobility—you can always move when you are boxed in
A ... is for authority—it takes the place of justice
N ... is for negotiate—though it very rarely works
U ... is for unilateral or one-sided
A ... is for adjudicate—to determine a case as a court
L ... is for last but not least—It is up to the discretion of the Postmaster.
This one line nullifies all the provisions supposedly made for our welfare.

Totally lacking any power to confront postal management, the NALC had no choice other than to depend upon the legislative process. Consequently, battles over employment relations really took



place in congressional committees rather than at the negotiating table or on the workroom floor. The system—or lack of a system—came under increasing criticism during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. The censure came from a variety of sources: the NALC, the National Federation of Post Office Clerks, the AFL-CIO (the product of a merger between the two giant labor bodies in 1955), the American Bar Association, two Hoover Commissions, and the National Civil Service League. These groups all agreed on one major point: labor-management relations in the federal government seriously lagged behind private enterprise and even local governments. The NALC went much further in its critique, contending that the Department's authoritarian attitudes and practices were far more reminiscent of the Dark Ages than of the modern world that extolled consultation and cooperation.

Ever since World War II, countless legislative proposals to improve federal labor relations had been in the congressional hopper, primarily due to the efforts of the NALC and other postal unions, but none of these bills was ever brought to a vote. By the beginning of the Kennedy administration, however, the NALC's long, relentless campaign for union recognition legislation was gaining ground. The Rhodes-Johnston Bill, providing for recognition and collective bargaining, was on the verge of enactment. In addition, more than 20 union recognition bills were introduced in the House and the Senate in early 1961. Labor-management legislation was imminent.

President Kennedy, a supporter of union recognition while a senator, made his move on June 22, 1961. Fearing that congressional action might foist a labor relations system on the government which he was unprepared to accept, Kennedy pulled the rug from under



National Postal Museum Library



President John F. Kennedy signs Executive Order 10988 on January 17, 1962. NALC President William C. Doherty (fourth from left) looks on.

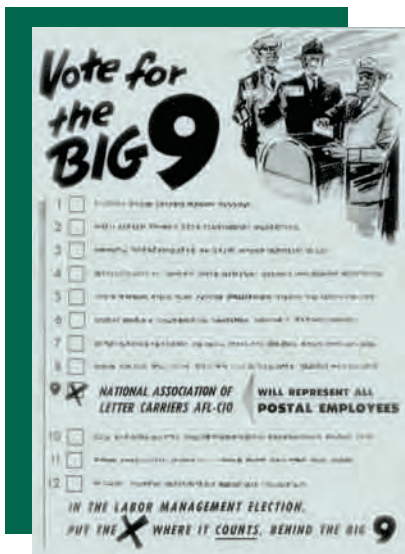
everyone’s feet by establishing a Task Force to study the issue. This effectively stopped any action in Congress. Then, on January 17, 1962, Kennedy signed Executive Order 10988. The order—which NALC President Bill Doherty called the “Magna Carta for Government Workers”—replaced the outdated Lloyd-LaFollette Act of 1912.

Executive Order 10988 established an Employee-Management Cooperation Program in the federal government. The program officially recognized the legitimate role of unions in the formulation and implementation of personnel policies. From the NALC’s perspective, the most significant provisions of the Order concerned representational rights. Kennedy’s Order provided that a labor organization would gain “national exclusive recognition” once a majority of the employees in the appropriate “bargaining unit” chose the organization as its representative. The organization would then represent

employees in grievance discussions, and negotiate a national contract with management. Although bargaining would exclude wages, hours, and fringe benefits, the NALC had, at long last, gained the right to protect its members on the workroom floor.

In compliance with the Order, the Post Office Department conducted a nationwide representation election in June 1962. The NALC ran a spirited election campaign, urging carriers to vote for the “Big 9”—since the union was ninth on the ballot. Over 367,000 postal workers participated and, not surprisingly, the NALC led the balloting with over one-third of the total votes cast. On July 1, 1962, six major postal unions were granted national exclusive recognition. For the first time in NALC’s history, the union had the right to represent all city delivery carriers in dealings with postal management.

With no experience or background in collective bargaining on either side, the NALC and the Post Office Department entered into their first negotiations in mid-October. Since Bill



Doherty had retired earlier that year to become the Ambassador to Jamaica, the new NALC president, Jerome J. Keating, led the NALC negotiating team. Five months later, on March 20, 1963, the first National Postal Agreement was signed. After signing, Keating reflected,

... such triumphs are never instantaneous creations. They never spring complete and perfect from the brow of any individual. Years of campaigning on the part of the postal unions preceded the events.

The NALC adapted swiftly to the demands of the new collective bargaining environment. Three more national agreements were signed—in 1964, 1965 and 1966. However, during the course of negotiations in 1965 and 1966, a serious flaw in the Order became all too apparent: there was no mechanism to compel the Department to reach an agreement—or honor one once reached. In other words, the Department was required to consult and negotiate with the NALC, but management retained its final decision-making authority. For example, all arbitration decisions were advisory rather than binding, and there were no provisions for the arbitration of bargaining impasses. In fact, the Department could even disregard its prior commitments by claiming an “emergency situation.”

Frustrated by this imbalance of power, a carrier in Fort Plain, New York, asked in 1965:

What good is the national contract when the Department can take away all these supposed rights at their whim? What kind of contract is it where one side does not have to live up to its agreements if it does not desire?

Yet despite its obvious limitations, Executive Order 10988 provided the NALC with an important education in

the art of negotiation and collective bargaining. These skills would prove to be crucial in the struggles to come.

PROMISES, PROMISES

In the same year John F. Kennedy signed Executive Order 10988, Congress passed legislation guaranteeing that the wages of all postal and federal workers would keep pace with the rising salaries of workers in private industry. The Comparability Act of 1962—much like Executive Order 10988—stirred hope among the rank-and-file letter carriers whose wages had lagged well behind the pay of their middle-class friends and neighbors working in private industry during the economic expansion of the 1950s. The frantic race to keep up with workers in private industry appeared over, and there was a general belief



Milwaukee Journal

When John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, letter carriers throughout the nation mourned his death. Over 300 uniformed letter carriers attended a special memorial service in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

BLACK LETTER CARRIERS

Although never entirely free from the racism pervading American society, the United States Post Office has long been a place of exceptional economic opportunity for black workers, and blacks have carried the nation's mail since almost the beginning of city delivery service. The earliest known black letter carrier may have been James B. Christian of Richmond, Virginia, who began carrying mail 1869, followed a few months later by William Carney who was founding vice president of NALC Branch 18 in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

William Carney wears a Civil War coat on his New Bedford mail route, circa 1890.



Carl Cruz collection, New Bedford Historical Society

A runaway slave, Carney suffered such severe wounds in the suicidal assault on Confederate Fort Wagner near Charleston, South Carolina by the all-black, all-volunteer 54th Regiment Massachusetts Infantry in 1863, that for more than 30 years he limped every step of the way as he delivered mail in New Bedford.

Information about early black letter carriers is scant, but it is likely that many were Civil War veterans like Carney. It is also clear that some held union leadership positions in cities like Memphis and Little Rock in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, until at least World War II, few African Americans carried the mail—with one account claiming under 1,400 belonged to the NALC by the late 1920s, less than three percent of the total membership.

The history of African-Americans in the NALC reflects the changing nature of race relations in the larger society. For many decades, NALC convention delegates debated whether the union would accommodate itself to the practice of segregated branches, which existed in certain regions of the country. The Dallas convention in 1917 approved “dual charters”—one branch for whites and another for blacks in the same city—but two years later the Philadelphia convention repealed this constitutional provision. Despite the 1919 action, hundreds of segregated branches chartered between 1917 and 1919 continued to function for decades, and attempts were made to revive issuance of dual charters at convention after convention. Finally, in 1941, proponents of dual charters succeeded, claiming that in some single charter cities—primarily, but not exclusively, in the deep south—black letter carriers were being frozen out of white branches and that, in fact, there were also cases where branches controlled by

black carriers refused membership to newly hired whites.

This action was reversed in 1954, but dual charters continued to exist in some cities until delegates to the 1960 Cincinnati convention instructed NALC officers to merge all remaining dual charter branches. By the 1962 convention, only two branches had failed to comply and they both surrendered their charters, finally making dual charters a relic of the past.

The resolution of the dual charter issue marked the beginning of the full integration of African-Americans into the union. Until then, the national leadership of the union had been entirely white. In the mid-1960s, however, black carriers were appointed national field directors, later called national business agents, and from the 1970s on, they filled leadership roles at every level of the union, including resident officer positions. By 2014, African-Americans comprised more than one-fifth of the active carrier workforce, and an ever growing number of the union's retirees.

Like the country as a whole when confronted with the issue of race, the NALC has for decades been engaged in an agonizing self-appraisal of its own ideals. Perhaps a black carrier from Yazoo City,





Mississippi best expressed what the union would later unequivocally stand for when, during the dual charter debate in 1919 in Philadelphia, he reminded his fellow delegates:

“To make this world safe for democracy is to treat all men right and equal....I am not pleading to you in the interest of the colored, white, Indian, Chinaman, Japanese, Norwegian or any race of men, but as an American citizen pleading for right and justice for all men.”



that, at long last, there would be justice for letter carriers.

But this feeling was short-lived, for by the mid-1960s disenchantment had begun to set in. In 1964, a small pay raise based on the comparability principle was passed by Congress, but only after an 18-month struggle by the NALC. And in 1965, the NALC encountered new barriers: the Vietnam War and the threat of spiraling inflation. President Lyndon Johnson, refusing to increase taxes to prevent inflation, issued wage guidelines proposing that private and public sector wage increases stay within 2.3 percent a year. In response, trade unions forcefully argued that labor would be the *victim* of inflation, not the cause, and private-sector unions ignored the guidelines. Public-sector workers, however, were not so fortunate.

Ironically, when the NALC embarked on its salary campaign in 1965, it was confident of one thing: Lyndon Baines Johnson. During his 24 years in the House and the Senate, Johnson had never voted against the welfare of letter carriers, and he had strongly supported the pay comparability principle in 1962 and 1964. So in 1965, letter carriers were understandably unprepared for what was in store for them. Johnson, consumed by the war and the possibility that rampant inflation would damage his “Great Society” programs, did a complete about-face. When Rep. Morris Udall authored a bill to close the comparability gap by 1968, Johnson rejected it out-of-hand. Instead, he offered postal and federal workers a choice—a 3.6 percent across-the-board pay increase, or nothing at all. The NALC, recognizing that the proposed increase would not bring carriers into parity with comparable workers in the private sector, was shocked at Johnson’s position and angrily protested. But in the end, Congress bowed to administration pressure and passed a miserable 3.6 percent wage increase.

Representative Udall, after describing the new pay bill as a “toothless, watered-down, emaciated, illegitimate outrage ... an abortion of a pay bill,” asked two agonizing questions:



Jerome J. Keating

Were all the great principles of the 1962 Federal Pay Reform Act mere platitudes to lull postal and other federal employees ... into a false hope that we had finally laid the foundation for a sensible and workable salary system? Is federal salary comparability, after all, only a myth?

By the end of 1965, letter carriers throughout the country knew the answer to both these questions.

AN ENDURANCE TEST: 1966-68

Unrest in the NALC burst forth in 1966, as abuses increased and morale plummeted. At the NALC's Detroit convention in August, President Jerome J. Keating gave a powerful, fighting speech denouncing the Johnson administration's latest offer of a 2.9 percent pay increase—even less than the year before. Again, President Johnson was attempting to prevent inflation by forcing public workers to accept painfully low wages.

That same summer, the Post Office Department issued a barrage of new cost-cutting policies and procedures. These measures—which included severe curtailment of overtime for experienced workers as well as an increase in the use of temporaries—markedly increased on-the-job frustrations for carriers. Service deteriorated and working conditions became intolerable. During August and September of 1966, carriers from all over the nation wrote NALC National Headquarters to describe the situation:

Batesville, Arkansas: Three hundred first-class letters curtailed because of no overtime on three different days in July.

Columbus, Ohio: Eighteen-year-old seasonal assistant dumped 1,000 letters, 325 magazines into field.

Dothan, Alabama: Two regulars called from annual leave to avoid overtime to others.

Buffalo, New York: 35 auxiliary routes at this office. Clerks frequently paid overtime while carriers held to 40 hours or less.

Marion, Ohio: One temporary employee left four relays undelivered. His girlfriend helped him deliver the rest.

Atlantic City, New Jersey: Up to 70 feet of first-class mail not distributed each Saturday in July, causing delays in delivery.

In October 1966, the system broke down completely. Almost every major post office in the country reported huge backlogs of undelivered mail. In Chicago alone, more than 10 million pieces of mail were piled up for three weeks. The cause—restrictions on use of overtime and greater use of temporaries.

NALCREST

The possibility of sponsoring a non-profit retirement home for letter carriers and their spouses was originally discussed at NALC's Cleveland convention in 1954. Acting on a resolution approved by the San Francisco convention in 1958, the NALC appointed a special committee to study the proposed project.

After much study, the NALC decided to build a retirement facility on a 153-acre tract in Polk County on the shore of Lake Weohyakapka (Walk-in-the-Water) in central Florida, midway between Tampa on the Gulf Coast and Vero Beach on the Atlantic Coast. Ground was broken on July 1, 1962, with NALC President Doherty turning the first shovel of earth.

The community was named "NALCREST," short for "National Association of Letter Carriers Retirement, Education, Security and Training." More than 2,000 people celebrated Nalcrest's dedication ceremony on January 20, 1964, as the dream of a permanent retirement home for letter carriers came true.

Over the years, Nalcrest has developed into a full-fledged retirement community with 500 apartments clustered in 66 one-story buildings, a "Town Center," the 500-seat William C. Doherty auditorium, and a sports complex named in honor of NALC President Vincent R. Sombrotto. Fully owned by the NALC since September 2002 when NALC's mortgage was retired, no union dues are



used to support the facility. Rather, as a non-profit community, Nalcrest's reasonable rents cover operating expenses.

Nalcrest residents, although retired, constantly demonstrate their union heritage and social service values. Retired carriers meet as Branch 1-A—an honorary branch of the NALC, since residents must maintain their membership in their home branches. Residents also band together during difficult times to maintain their community—such as when three hurricanes wreaked havoc on the area in 2004.



President William C. Doherty turns the first shovel of earth on July 1, 1962, culminating his campaign to create Nalcrest. Doherty later resided there until his death in 1987. Left: Nalcrest in 2014.



Soon after the backlogs were cleared and the immediate crisis ended, Congress yielded to administration pressure and passed Johnson's pay bill. Carriers would receive another pittance—a 2.9 percent raise. A Paterson, New Jersey carrier expressed the deepening dissatisfaction:

To this writer, our choice is clear, we can no longer afford the luxury of indulging ourselves and kidding ourselves that we can make do with a small increase.... I, for one, feel another 2.9 percent would not help and in my opinion I would rather go down fighting than accept another such insult.

But carriers' meager pay increases were affecting much more than their pride. Many carriers were struggling just to remain above the poverty line. Their wages were so low that in some states, carriers were eligible to receive food stamps, Medicaid and other assistance designed for the poor. Ironically, Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" was helping some letter carrier families to survive.

Breakdowns in service, deteriorating

working conditions and poverty-level wages took their toll: Morale fell so low that many carriers were leaving the Service for better jobs in private industry. By 1967, the employee turnover rate in the Service was approximately 26 percent a year, and it was difficult to find people willing to work as carriers.

In the 1967 and 1968 contract negotiations, the Post Office Department turned its back on these grim realities, choosing to fan the already smoldering fires of resentment spreading through the ranks of carriers. The Department, believing it had lost too much power in earlier agreements, adopted a hard line, "take-it-or-leave-it" bargaining stance. This was especially true in 1968, when it successfully increased the power of local postmasters and took away many local bargaining rights the NALC had enjoyed during the previous three to four years.

The NALC and its members gave voice to their utter frustration at this turn of events—a frustration that many observers at the time believed stemmed from the union's inability to bargain over the bread-and-butter issues of wages and benefits. In many ways, this

WOMEN LETTER CARRIERS

Women letter carriers in 1917.



National Postal Museum Library

As early as 1895, *The Postal Record* reported that feminists and suffragettes were demanding that women be allowed to work as letter carriers. And some women—probably not many—did deliver the mail in the early days of letter carrier history, even under the most difficult conditions. In fact, in the 1890s, *The Postal Record* reported at least two instances of women delivering mail in the West under challenging and sometimes dangerous conditions. But despite these exceptions, the hopes of the

early equal rights advocates were a long time coming, for the letter carrier craft remained nearly all-male for many years.

Women letter carriers made their first appearance on city streets during World War I and II, taking the places of men drafted into military service. Almost all of these women carried the mail temporarily, relinquishing their jobs as men returned home from war. By 1956, only 92 women nationwide served as city carriers.

But in the 1960s, women began to enter the letter carrier craft in greater numbers, propelled by the rise of the modern

judgment was correct—but it was also incomplete. Observers were underestimating the mood of letter carriers. Carriers were tired of begging for better wages, yes. But they were just as tired of the blatant inequality of power between the Department and themselves. Fed up with the perception that they lacked muscle, carriers began to voice a growing militancy. In August 1968, a Cincinnati, Ohio letter carrier expressed what was on the minds of many:

We are not in a kidding mood. Far from it. We are deadly serious. This is the reason we must come up with some answers—now! Our members are sick to death of the “you have to take what they dish out” attitude. Do we have to continue to take it? Or is there another way out? Must we always come begging for the “crumbs” of what other labor forces would call “antique?”

The letter carriers of this country are not of “faint heart.” And we cannot long endure the classification of second-class citizens.... Resolutions may be introduced [at the upcoming NALC convention], and

if accepted, could give our membership the right to “carry a big stick.” This would not be the first time the subject of the right to strike was brought up at conventions. The difference is, this year the delegates may just be mad enough to do something about it.

THE GATHERING STORM

With some of the union’s national leaders urging members to embrace “militant unionism,” letter carriers were becoming increasingly assertive during the summer of 1968. Alarmed, in July the Post Office Department issued a strike contingency plan to all regional directors, field postal inspectors, and local postmasters in first-class offices. But the union’s unwillingness to take collective action became clear when 3,700 delegates from across the country gathered in Boston in August 1968 for NALC’s national convention.

women’s movement and the escalating Vietnam conflict that both drew more men into military service and created high-paying defense-industry jobs. Despite enduring occasional discrimination and harassment from managers, co-workers and customers, the number of women carriers climbed steadily if slowly, reaching 5,000 shortly after the creation of the USPS 1971, and topping 16,000 in 1982. By 2014, over 58,000 women comprised more than 30 percent of the city carrier workforce.

With a parallel increase in the percentage of women in the NALC, female carriers have

become a growing force in the union. In recent years, women have held resident officer positions such as secretary-treasurer, assistant secretary-treasurer and director of life insurance and have also served as national trustees, national business agents and regional administrative assistants. Hundreds of women also serve as branch presidents, branch secretaries, stewards, arbitration advocates and dispute resolution team members, while a large number are presidents of state associations. In addition, women comprise roughly a quarter of national convention delegates and over nine percent of the union’s retired membership.





National Postal Museum Library

The union insisted that if there were to be a postal corporation, postal workers must have the right to strike.

With both the NALC's national and local leaders understandably concerned about the legal implications of the union even asserting its right to strike, sponsors of a resolution that called upon the union's national officers "when- ever it becomes necessary to do so...[to] use [the strike] weapon for the welfare of its members"

claimed that this was a misrepresentation of their views. They substituted a weaker resolution instructing NALC's national officers both to "investigate fully the legal and legislative technicalities" of giving the government employees the right to strike and to study the "feasibility of removing the no-strike oath" required as a condition of employment. Delegates approved the substitute resolution without objection and then voted down the original resolution, again without objection. Caution had trumped militancy.

If the decision to study the legal issues related to whether government employees could be granted the right to strike was intended to defuse carriers' growing anger, it failed, for it could not dampen the intensity of letter carriers' resentment.

Any hope that the impending crisis could be averted dimmed further with the inauguration of Richard Nixon as president in January 1969. Perhaps another kind of leader might have been able to empathize with the anger of letter carriers over decades of injustice—or

even to sense the inevitable conflict. But Richard Milhouse Nixon, who had served as vice president during the years of the Eisenhower vetoes, was not that leader. His actions pushed the deepening crisis closer to confrontation by raising expectations he would then thwart.

Just as Eisenhower had, Nixon offered the carriers empty promises. Immediately after taking office, the new president issued this statement:

To that underpaid man who [Postmaster General] Red Blount spoke to us about the other day who works in ... [New York] and starts at \$6,000 a year; if he went to the Sanitation Department, he could get \$10,000 a year. Let them know that we back them. Let them know that better days are coming....

Two days later, on February 12, 1969, the Nixon Administration announced its intention to increase postal pay by less than 3 percent. Then, on May 28, 1969, President Nixon announced his solid support for abolishing the Post Office as a cabinet-level Department of the Executive Branch and replacing it with a self-supporting postal corporation. All of the postal unions had vigorously opposed this idea ever since it was first proposed by Postmaster General Lawrence O'Brien in 1967 and subsequently endorsed by President Johnson's Kappel Commission on Postal Organization in 1968. The NALC and the other postal unions believed the nation's postal service should remain a public service—directly accountable to the people through their elected representatives. Furthermore, the NALC feared that if Congress were to lose its leading role in making postal policy, the NALC would lose the one powerful weapon it had developed over the years: lobbying Congress. So Nixon's strong commitment to postal reform at a time of approaching crisis pushed the NALC to a more radical position. The union insisted that if there

were to be a postal corporation, postal workers must have the right to strike—which Nixon’s plan banned, while also stripping away Civil Service benefits and protections.

Then, on June 17, 1969, Nixon demonstrated his blindness to the storm gathering around him. In the face of NALC’s lobbying for a substantial pay boost, he issued an Executive Order raising postal pay by 4.1 percent, effective July 1, 1969. With inflation running above 5 percent, this was far short of meeting the critical needs of postal employees barely able to make ends meet. NALC President James Rademacher, recognizing how short tempers had become, sent an open letter to every member the same day urging members to “cool it”—not engage in slow-downs or sick-outs—because the union had a comprehensive legislative battle plan to win a better increase. In a bid to pressure Congress for a better pay package, he also announced a court challenge to the “no-strike” oath required of all federal employees. A week later Rademacher, testifying before a House committee, denounced the proposed raise and declared that postal employees had the right to strike.

The discontent, however, could not be contained, and embittered workers in New York City began to act. On June 20, protests erupted all over the city, with the largest held outside the Manhattan General Post Office, where more than 2,000 letter carriers and postal clerks shouted “Strike! Strike! Strike!” while carrying signs saying “Nuts to 4.1” and



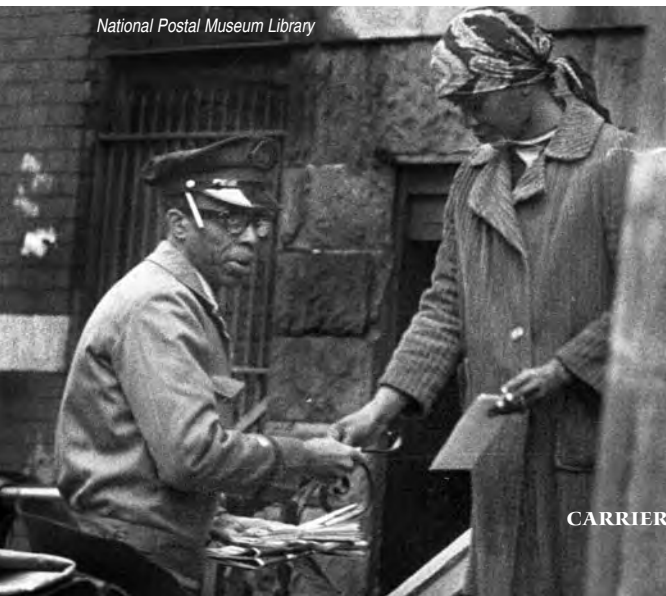
Low pay did not prevent letter carriers from doing their jobs with unflinching dedication during the late 1960s. A letter carrier from Branch 39 continues casing the mail after a car crashed through a post office wall in Indianapolis.

“Pay, Not Peanuts.” One protester even brandished a hand-written sign, “How about an all-out sick call.” Another 400 postal workers protested at the Grand Central Post Office in midtown Manhattan where they chanted “No Mail Monday” and “I’m Sick Monday.” On the steps of the Brooklyn Post Office, a mass protest turned ugly when the police intervened and two carriers were arrested.

Although the mail was delivered in New York the following Monday, on July 1, 1969, 11 days after the mass protests, events escalated. Almost all of the letter carriers and postal clerks at the Kingsbridge Station in the Bronx called in sick. In response, the New York City postmaster sprang into action, carefully following the instructions detailed in the strike contingency plan. Supervisory personnel were called in to scab, postal inspectors launched an investigation of the action, and all absent workers were given 24 hours to answer charges that they had engaged in an illegal activity. The very next day, while all 56 letter carriers and 16 clerks at Kingsbridge were being suspended, 16 of the 36 letter carriers in the Throggs Neck Branch, also in the Bronx, called in sick, and they too were suspended almost immediately.

The disruption of service was minor, and eventually all the employees returned to work after most served a two-week suspension, with the rest judged to have legitimate excuses for not working on the days of the sick-out. But letter carriers and postal clerks

National Postal Museum Library



Forty letter carriers from Branch 41 in Brooklyn applying for welfare in 1969.



in New York were far from frightened by the Department's investigations and suspensions, as radio reports of the "sick-outs" sent a charge of electricity throughout Branch 36's membership and strengthened the resolve of the increasingly angry letter carriers who were gaining a sense of control and pride. They understood that the Kingsbridge and Throggs Neck carriers had defied the government by engaging in illegal job actions.

In an effort to keep the lid on, Rademacher traveled to New York in August for a special meeting of Branch 36, the union's largest with 7,200 members in Manhattan and the Bronx. At the meeting, called to consider the ramifications of the July job action, Rademacher told cheering New York carriers that pay legislation was certain to pass within the next six weeks, and if not, he would personally lead a strike. In the meantime, he urged calm.

Through the end of the summer and throughout the fall, all remained quiet in New York, for although the six-week deadline passed with the prospects of pay legislation uncertain at best, the NALC president wavered. Congress, the

Department, Nixon and Rademacher continued to haggle over postal reform and postal pay, with Nixon taking the position that no postal pay bill would pass unless the legislation also established a postal corporation. But with Christmas nearing, the monthly meetings of Branch 36 grew more and more stormy as Branch 36's leaders, frightened by the possibility of an illegal strike, were faced with an increasingly militant rank-and-file willing to take whatever steps were necessary to lift themselves out of economic impoverishment. With hundreds of New York and Brooklyn letter carriers receiving welfare—in fact, one carrier qualified for \$133 a month more in benefits than his take-home pay—carriers' economic situation was an open sore that would not heal.

But the specific issue that galvanized rank-and-file opposition to the branch leadership was the rank-and-file's efforts to compel the branch to compensate the Kingsbridge and Throggs Neck carriers who had been suspended. Although the branch had already reached a settlement with postal management allowing those

carriers to use their annual leave during the two weeks they were suspended, at a special meeting, members dissatisfied with the settlement demanded that the branch also pay the suspended carriers two-thirds pay, an action the New York Metro Area Postal Union representing the clerks at the two Bronx stations had already taken. Branch 36's leadership prevailed at the special meeting and throughout the fall, but the members who supported the Kingsbridge and Throggs Neck carriers began to build a network of like-minded carriers by collecting the names and phone numbers of those who spoke in favor of paying the Bronx carriers. At the December meeting, the measure's proponents were again unsuccessful, but they found their voice as large numbers of members demanded the branch leadership call a job action during the traditionally busy Christmas season. Local union officials were frightened by the mood of these carriers. An article in *Time* magazine later described this tumultuous meeting:

Stamping their feet and clapping their hands, members of Branch 36 broke up their December meeting with raucous cries of "Strike! Strike!"

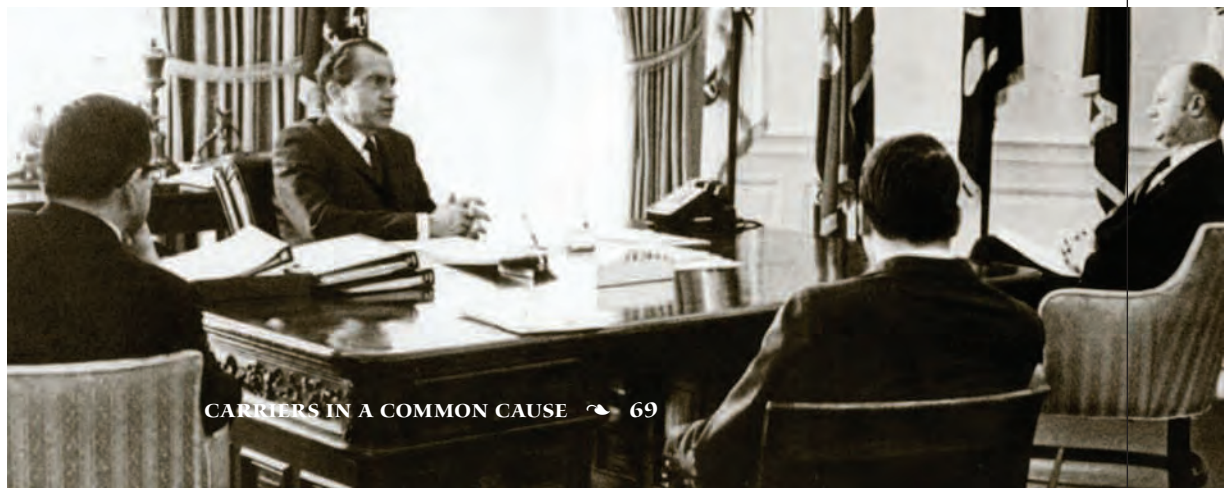
The mushrooming militancy of the members also was a major concern to NALC President James Rademacher. Even though in June, Rademacher had asserted the right of letter carriers to strike and had, in New York in August, assured the city's carriers he would lead a strike if Congress did not approve a fair wage increase, in his mind, the threat of the strike and not the strike

itself was the weapon of choice to force Congress to approve a decent wage for his members. He feared that if a strike were called, only a few members might go out. So in December 1969, when Richard Nixon asked Rademacher to meet privately with him to forge a compromise on postal pay and postal reform, Rademacher agreed.

The two men met in the White House on December 18, 1969—alone except for the presence of two White House lawyers. At this meeting, they reached the long-sought compromise. Nixon agreed to support a 5.4 percent pay increase effective January 1, 1970. In return, Rademacher endorsed the idea of an independent "postal authority" which, since the strike ban was retained, would bargain with postal unions over wages, hours and working conditions, with binding arbitration the last resort for issues the parties could not resolve.

But when the results of the Rademacher-Nixon meeting became public, the leaders of other postal unions as well as members of Congress were outraged that they had been excluded. And letter carriers were incensed. They were fed up with compromises and promises of better days to come. At Branch 36's January 1970 meeting, the members rejected the branch leadership's endorsement of the Nixon-Rademacher pact and also passed by the required two-thirds vote the proposal to compensate the suspended Bronx carriers. Rademacher had seriously misjudged the mood of many of his members in New York and, as events would prove, elsewhere throughout the nation. Letter carriers would not be easily appeased.

The Nixon-Rademacher meeting, December 18, 1969.





1970

A STRIKE IS CALLED

Not surprisingly, New York was the center of the drama, for the city itself had been a cauldron of social unrest, with protests against the Vietnam War, urban race riots, strikes by teachers, transportation and sanitation workers dominating the news for several years. Angry Branch 36 members had already raised their voices protesting the federal government's indifference to their plight and their own union's ambivalence, and they became enraged in early February 1970, when Nixon deferred a wage increase scheduled for July 1.

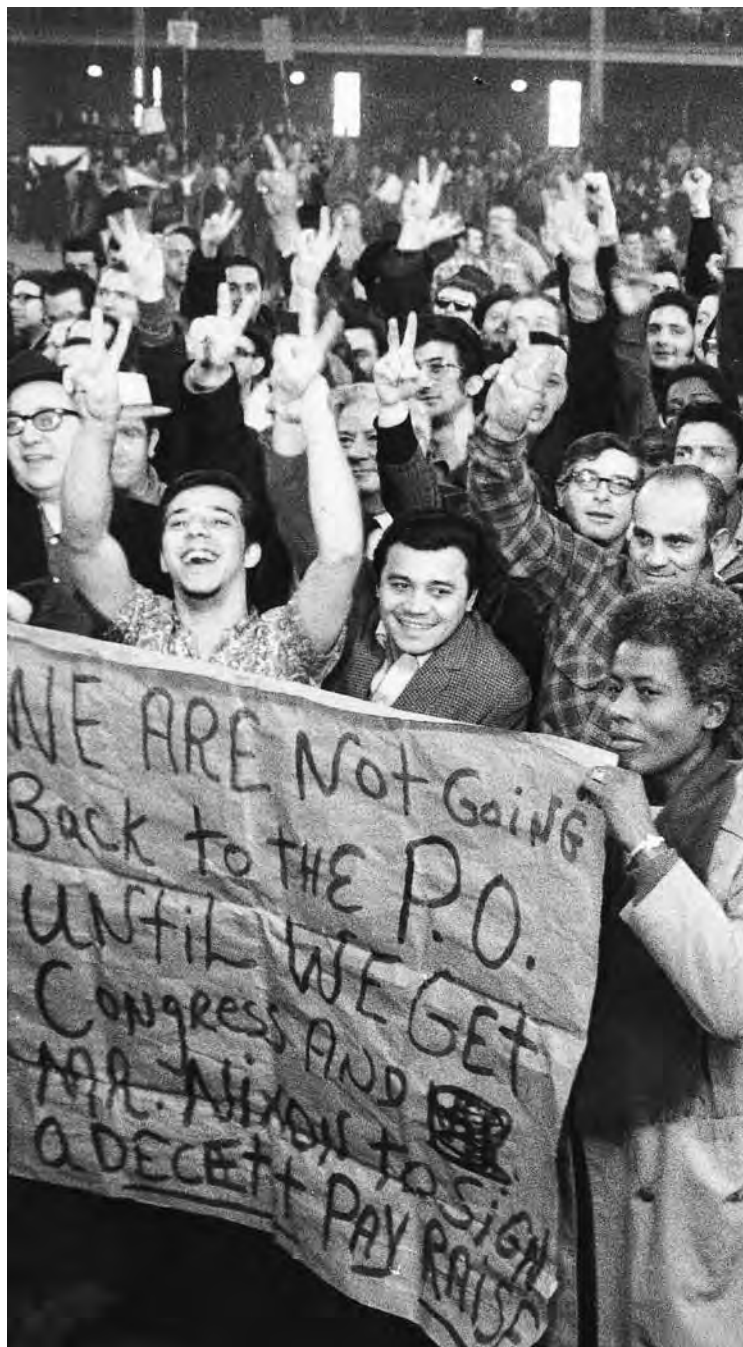
But the spark that lit the fuse was the news that on March 12, a House committee approved a bill reflecting the Nixon-Rademacher compromise. At the regular branch meeting that same day, Branch 36 President Gustave Johnson was interrupted as he delivered a report about the Nixon-Rademacher bill. Although the branch's executive board had earlier directed stewards to tell carriers to oppose calling for a strike, angry carriers exploded with shouts of "No, no! Not enough! Strike! Enough talk! Strike!" and demanded a strike vote. Raucous debate verging on a brawl ended with an agreement to meet again the next Tuesday, March 17, and hold a strike vote at that time.

But with Branch 36's leaders, supported by Rademacher, dead set against a strike and fearful that a meeting might work to the benefit of the more militant members of the branch, the officers arranged only for the vote. With members' credentials challenged in an effort to discourage voting and creating long lines at the voting machines, the vote on March 17, 1970 at the Manhattan Center dragged on until around 10:30 p.m. Some 30 minutes later, the results were announced to the members: 1,555—yes; 1,055—no. NALC's largest local had chosen by a 3-to-2 margin to strike against the U.S. Government regardless of whether the national union joined the strike.

Johnson told the cheering members, “There will be no mail delivery tomorrow in New York,” adding, “Your voice has been heard tonight.” The leader of New York Metro Area Postal Workers, the union representing the inside workers in the post office, said his members would honor carriers’ picket lines even though they could not vote whether to strike until the union’s next regular meeting in three weeks. But Brooklyn Branch 41’s president immediately announced that his carriers would join the strike. Letter carriers had taken a stand. The long-threatened strike was on.

Since Branch 36 had night routers, the strike began throughout Manhattan and the Bronx earlier than elsewhere in the New York area. At 12:01 a.m., March 18, members of Branch 36 set up picket lines outside post offices and, although not all the members had voted, almost every letter carrier in Branch 36 stayed out. Immediately, over 25,000 postal clerks and drivers—members of the giant Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union—honored the picket lines. And later in the morning, when carriers in Brooklyn and in many parts of Long Island, northern New Jersey and nearby Connecticut should have reported to work, many of their branches joined the strike.

And then the wildfire swept the nation: Branch 34, Boston, Massachusetts; Branch 157, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Branch 1, Detroit, Michigan; Branch 40, Cleveland, Ohio; Branch 84, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Branch 214, San Francisco, California; Branch 9, Minneapolis and



Postal strikers at the 369th Regimental Armory in New York City refusing to return to work.

Jack Manning, The New York Times

Bill Braginetz said it best—in fact, said it so well that today, years later, I remember it word for word: “For the first time, I finally feel like a human being,” he told me with tears in his eyes on the afternoon of March 18, 1970, as we walked up and down East 45th Street in front of the Grand Central Station post office in Manhattan where we had worked together for more than two decades—Bill, always the perfect carrier, on time all the time, and me, always the cut up and far from perfect.

Shortly before midnight, I walked across Manhattan toward Grand Central Station post office on the East Side with two other Grand Central carriers—Eddie Morris and Charlie Sprinkle. Eddie and Charlie had grabbed sheets of oak tag from my truck for picket signs, and we carried some wooden barriers, used earlier that day for the St. Patrick’s Day parade, over to East 45th Street outside the post office. At midnight, about a hundred night letter carrier routers and all the clerks and other postal employees poured out of the building to join us, and every carrier and clerk just then coming to work honored the line.

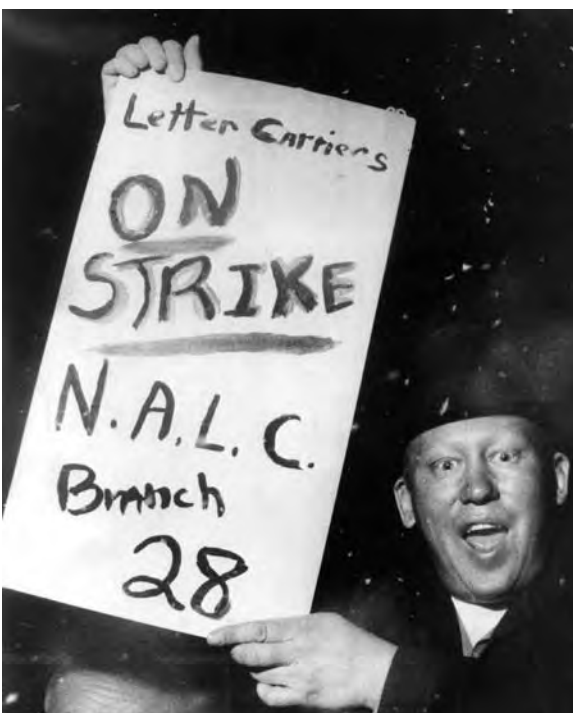
Personal recollections of Vincent R. Sombrotto, Branch 36, New York, NY



Pickets on duty at the Dearborn, Michigan Post Office. Ira Rosenberg, *Detroit Free Press*

First day on a new job: A soldier from Fort Dix, NJ sorts mail at the Brooklyn General Post Office. Barton Silverman, *The New York Times*





Minneapolis Tribune

Branch 28, St. Paul, Minnesota; Branch 47, Denver, Colorado; Branch 11, Chicago, Illinois. In large and small communities alike, from coast to coast, letter carriers and postal clerks walked off their jobs, joined the picket line, and dug in for the duration. By March 23 the strikers numbered over 200,000 strong.

VICTORY!

Almost immediately after Branch 36 set up picket lines on March 18, the Nixon administration began maneuvering to crack the workers' revolt. Government lawyers in New York obtained an injunction ordering a return to work. But Branch 36's strikers defied the order. As the walk-out spread, more court orders were issued, and local NALC leaders found themselves in the nearly unprecedented and certainly uncomfortable position of seeking legal aid and, in some cases, dodging federal process servers.

As the strike reached across the country, NALC President James Rademacher was caught between his loyalty to his members and his concern for the union's future. The incendiary rhetoric he had employed in New York the previous year when, in the aftermath of the two job actions in the Bronx, he had vowed to lead a strike if



United Press International



The troops arrive in New York City.

United Press International

Striking letter carriers
in Paterson, New Jersey.
United Press International



pay legislation was not enacted within a few weeks, may have helped fuel the flames of revolt. Rademacher understood all the reasons why his members walked off their jobs to fight. Yet he feared

that if he assumed leadership of the wildcat strike, making it official, the government would totally crush the union—bankrupt it with fines, padlock its offices, strip away its jurisdiction, jail its officers and fire its members. Rademacher later would acknowledge that there are times when workers have no choice but to strike—he simply felt that the morning of March 18 was not such a time.

Trying to escape his dilemma and end the crisis, Rademacher first attempted to persuade the strikers to return to work. After being assured by the Nixon administration that negotiations would begin once the strike ended and only then, the NALC president carried this message to an emergency meeting of the presidents of the union's 300 largest branches on March 20 in Washington, DC. He personally urged the presidents to call their members back to work so he could pursue

negotiations, and in a spirited, noisy session, hundreds of local leaders accepted the idea with this proviso: If agreement were not reached in five days, NALC would stage a nationwide work stoppage.

The next day, Saturday, March 21, Rademacher sent a telegram to all 6,500 NALC branches outlining the plan—return to work Monday and allow five days for negotiations before taking nationwide action. But the back-to-work appeal had virtually no impact on the picket lines, because for many of the strikers, the wildcat was aimed as much at the union's failures as it was at the government's. At a meeting of Branch 36 the same day, the members voted almost unanimously to stay off the job, and across the country other branches voted to walk out or stay out.

His efforts at persuasion having failed, Rademacher turned on the strikers: At a press conference Sunday, March 22, he charged that the New York City walkout had been instigated partly by “subversive” elements—members of the left-wing Students for a Democratic Society. Rademacher also threatened Branch 36's leaders with expulsion from the NALC, and sent national officers out to the field to quash support for the strike.

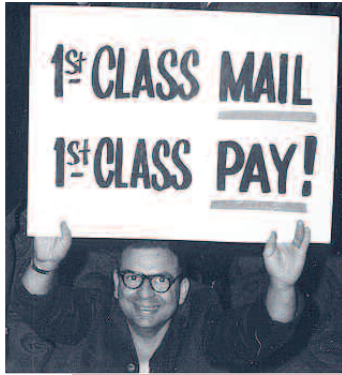
But on the picket lines, most striking carriers and clerks were not listening to the administration's promises nor those of Rademacher, for despite the pleas from the national union, fewer than 60 of some 200 branches out on strike returned to work. President Nixon, with business interests clamoring for action and the effects of the strike rolling across the country, went on the offensive on March 23 in an effort to end the crisis. On nationwide television, Nixon took his case to the American people and declared a national emergency. He also ordered 25,000 soldiers into New York City to move the mail. Not since Grover Cleveland became the first president to order troops to break a strike by calling infantry, cavalry and artillery units to end the 1894 Pullman railroad strike in Chicago had a president resorted to such a desperate and ill-conceived move. The troops were ineffective: They never moved much mail, as shipments had been embargoed across the country and the military units had none of the skills craft work-

ers possessed. Still, Nixon's use of soldiers as scabs, his implied threat to send troops to other cities, the mounting legal pressure and threatened fines, criticism of the wildcat action by AFL-CIO President George Meany plus Rademacher's appeals and claims of progress, together convinced many postal workers to return to work. But not the strikers in New York City.

It was only when the officers of Branch 36, relaying information provided by the union's national leadership, assured the striking letter carriers that an agreement had been reached with the administration that seemed to meet nearly every demand did the carriers and clerks in New York City put down their picket signs and return to work. But no such agreement existed, for what became known as the "phantom package" was simply NALC's proposal—a retroactive 12 percent pay increase, fully paid health benefits, an eight-year pay scale, collective bargaining with binding arbitration, and full amnesty for the strikers. Whether this was a deliberate deception, as many

The mail began to pile up as letter carriers and postal clerks went out on strike in Chicago.
AP Wide World Photos





The years of what some deemed “collective begging” were over.

believed at the time, or a misunderstanding, the effect was an end to the strike. The New York carriers never formally voted to return to work, but the eight-day revolt was over. First to go out and last to go back, New York City’s letter carriers had shown a resolve and courage that would not be forgotten.

As soon as the New York strikers returned to their jobs, Rademacher and other postal union leaders, assisted by the AFL-CIO, began round-the-clock negotiations with the Post Office Department. By April 2, the parties reached an agreement they believed would satisfy the demands of the carriers and clerks who, at great personal risk, had defied both the federal government and their national leaders.

The “Memorandum of Agreement” expressed the postal unions’ and the Department’s accord in four basic areas: pay increases totaling 14 percent—6 percent retroactive to December 27, 1969, and another 8 percent effective whenever a postal reform bill was enacted; support for the establishment of an independent postal authority; collective bargaining over wages, hours and working conditions with unresolved issues to be settled through final and binding arbitration; and “compression” of the time required for postal workers to reach the top step of their grade level from 21 years to eight.

Congress quickly approved the 6 percent retroactive pay increase, and this became law on April 15. Obtaining congressional approval of the remaining elements of the Memorandum of Agreement proved more difficult, and it was not until

August 12, 1970, that the Postal Reorganization Act became law. Letter carriers and other postal workers had, at long last, achieved full collective bargaining with their employer. Rademacher himself would be partly vindicated, for as the decades ahead proved, the postal reform legislation he had supported brought collective bargaining to postal employees, freeing them from “collective begging”—the total dependence on the good wishes and wisdom of their elected representatives.

Still, only with the strike could carriers have achieved substantial economic and legislative gains. The long struggle of letter carriers for dignity and justice had taken a great step forward. The strike—what news magazines at the time termed the “Revolt of the Good Guys”—was an uncoordinated, spontaneous uprising of aggrieved workers, longing not only for economic justice but also for a voice and a recognition of their dignity and humanity.

For many letter carriers, it was also a protest against local and national leaders whose concern for their members was outweighed by their understandable fear of what an all-powerful federal government could do to their union and their own liberty. As a result, they vacillated while the anger and resentment of carriers in New York and elsewhere in the country grew. In the end, the strikers changed the Postal Service and their union. And yet the struggle for dignity and justice would continue in the years ahead—on different battlefields and with different weapons.

1971-1978

IN THE AFTERMATH OF VICTORY

Both the strike of 1970 and the passage of the Postal Reorganization Act which soon followed jolted the course of NALC history. For whether letter carriers joined picket lines or stayed on the job, their working lives and their union lives would never be the same.

Carriers now worked for a new employer. The old Post Office Department had been put to rest, replaced by the U.S. Postal Service. But more had changed than simply a name or the patch carriers wore on their sleeves. Congress told the new employer to be “business-like”— to take whatever steps might be necessary to “break even” on the accounting ledger. For carriers this meant speed-ups, harassment, over-supervision and, most important, a renewed dependence upon the union to combat management’s more aggressive style.

The NALC, too, would never be the same, for the strike released forces that would revolutionize the union from within. Local strike leaders did not quickly forget their successful challenge to the NALC national leadership as well as to the courts and the federal government. Nor did it escape their notice that while they had been victorious on the picket lines, they were still relatively powerless within the union.





NALC President James Rademacher signs the first collective bargaining agreement with the Postal Service in July 1971. Also shown (from left) are: Postmaster General Winton M. Blount and Federal Mediator William Usery.

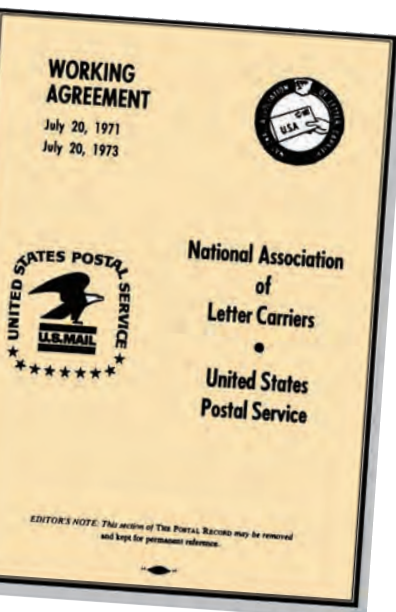
The wildcat strike had been led by rank-and-file members of Branch 36 in New York. It was in New York that the movement to change the NALC—to reshape it into a modern union capable of dealing as an equal with modern management—was launched. New York carriers without influence in branch affairs organized their own party with the slogan, “Get the leaders to change or change the leaders.” They criticized both the branch and national incumbent officers for failing to give leadership to the strike, for lack of success in dealing with postal management and—what was at the heart of the matter—for retaining internal union procedures and practices which prevented average letter carriers from becoming a political force within their own union.

In October 1970, candidates supported by a newly formed rank-and-file movement in New York City were elected in 22 out of 24 contests for station delegates, as NALC stewards were

then called. Shortly thereafter, the rank-and-filers challenged the incumbent branch president and other branch officers in what was the first contest for branch leadership in over 20 years. On December 2, 1970, the membership of Branch 36 swept Vincent R. Sombrotto and the remainder of the 20-man rank-and-file ticket into office. And, as was true of the strike earlier in 1970, events in New York anticipated those throughout the country: during the next four months rank-and-file slates won victories in Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Boston and other cities.

This political upheaval at the local level in early 1971 was taking place at the same time the NALC and the other postal unions were entering into the unions’ first national contract negotiations with the new U.S. Postal Service. Letter carriers hoped their newly won collective bargaining rights would lead to substantial improvements in wages and working conditions. In New York, where the militance that had ignited the 1970 strike had not yet died, these feelings were transformed into action on June 30, 1971. On that day, 12,000 postal workers in the city rallied in support of “a no contract—no work” position which was aimed as much at the national leadership of the NALC and other postal unions as it was at management itself.

The collective bargaining agreement that the NALC signed with the Postal Service on July 20, 1971 fell short of the expectations of many carriers in New York and elsewhere. Nevertheless, it was in many respects a major accomplishment, because not only did the contract provide for wage increases and a cost-of-living adjustment—the first ever for postal employees—it also contained a “no lay-off” clause which prohibited the Postal Service from laying off carriers and other bargain-



ing-unit employees “on an involuntary basis.” Still, some carriers criticized the agreement’s failure to improve fringe benefits and to preserve strict craft lines between carrier and clerk duties. In addition, the wide disciplinary powers granted management were soundly attacked.

One New York rank-and-file leader, believing that the contract had given unbridled authority to the new budget-conscious postal management, articulated what many dissenting carriers felt: that the new contract would lead to “increased supervision and harassment of letter carriers; arbitrary discipline; increased productivity with no benefits; reductions in personnel;

elimination of carrier assignments; accelerated changes and additions to letter carriers’ routes; deteriorating service which would bring unfair criticism from the patrons to the letter carrier; and an overall and large-scale problem of low morale.”

While prospects of a more authoritarian, more heavy-handed postal management clearly concerned many of the letter carriers associated with the local rank-and-file movements springing up throughout the country, these carriers were equally troubled by what they perceived to be an authoritarian, heavy-handed NALC national leadership. During the 1971 negotiations, the national union had placed

BRANCH MERGERS

While to a great extent NALC was first organized in large cities—Detroit, Milwaukee, Buffalo, for example—by the early 20th century more and more of the union’s branches were exceedingly small. Increasingly, branches represented a single work station, with only a handful of carriers. This provided a sense of intimacy and loyalty, but it also resulted in an enormous number of branches. By 1970, NALC consisted of over 6,600 branches, many of them with only one or two members. Only those in the nation’s largest cities could support full-time officers.

With the passage of the Postal Reorganization Act, the union intentionally set out to modernize its structure. Recognizing that the challenges of collective bargaining would require a pooling of numbers and resources, delegates to the 1970 National Convention in Hawaii approved an amendment allowing branches to merge with one another.

This provision was rapidly implemented throughout the country. In 1973, 103

branches on Long Island came together to form Long Island Merged Branch 6000 with a combined membership of over 3,000. Across the continent, 26 southern California branches totaling 2,000 members joined forces as Merged Branch 1100. By the end of that year, there were 23 mergers in New Jersey, 13 in Texas, and 12 in Ohio. Merger fever has continued ever since as more and more branches recognized that mergers can improve representation by making part- and full-time officers more feasible and by giving branches a greater opportunity to send members to state and national conventions and training sessions.

All in all, since the 1970 Hawaii convention, the union has gained thousands of members, while reducing the number of branches dramatically. By mid-2014, NALC’s

270,000 members belonged to approximately 2,052 branches, with almost 85 percent of the members in the largest 337 branches—those with at least 150 members. This suggests that the union continues to consist of a small number of medium to large-size “full service” branches and a large number of very small branches that do not have a local dues structure and thus lack the resources to represent their members on the workroom floor and to take an active part in the NALC legislative and political program as well attend state and national events.



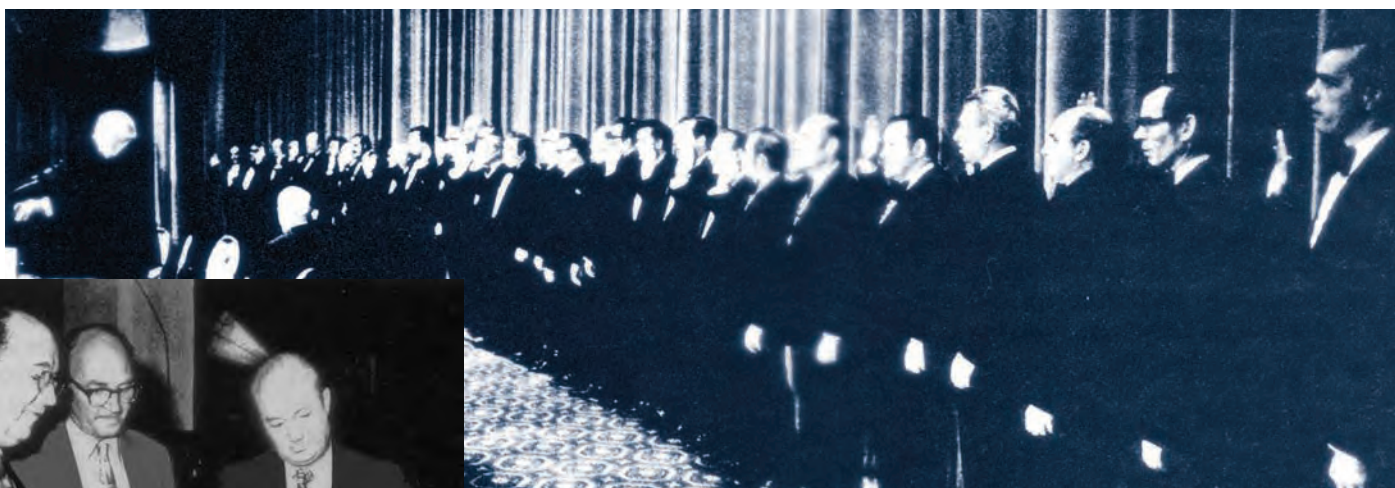
Branch 36—then in the early days of Vincent R. Sombrotto's new rank-and-file administration—under trusteeship. Although cut off from the union dues which would normally have flowed from national headquarters in Washington, Sombrotto and his team maintained control of the union's affairs for almost the entire six months of the trusteeship. This defiant show of self-reliance strengthened the resolve of other rank-and-filers throughout the country who were already convinced that the national leadership was either uninterested in or perhaps even afraid of the mass participation of letter carriers in union affairs.

At a conference of concerned letter carriers in Minneapolis on October 13, 1971, local rank-and-filers formed themselves into the National Rank-and-File Movement with a permanent coordinating committee. The conference also set out three basic tenets.

First, all national officers should be elected directly by the membership. These "one-man, one-vote" referendum elections would replace the exist-

ing proxy system which allowed delegates to national conventions to cast ballots on behalf of the absent membership—even on behalf of members of branches not in attendance at a convention. Second, the union's regionally based national field directors—precursors to the national business agents—should be elected only by members from the directors' own regions. Under such a provision, a letter carrier in California could no longer vote for the regional representative of a Massachusetts carrier. Finally, all nationally negotiated collective bargaining agreements would have to be submitted to the membership for ratification.

The rank-and-file movement achieved all three of these goals during the next three years. Delegates at the 1972 national convention in New Orleans adopted the "one-man, one-vote" amendment when NALC President James Rademacher, recognizing which way the winds of changes were blowing, acceded to the wishes of the membership and reluctantly



Top: President Emeritus William C. Doherty installs NALC national officers in January 1975 in Washington, DC following the first "one-man, one-vote" referendum election in the union's history.

Left: NALC President James Rademacher (right) checks the 1973 tentative "Working Agreements" as they are placed in the mail to be sent to the membership for ratification.

endorsed the amendment. However, the other two democratizing measures—one providing for regionally elected representatives in each of the 15 NALC regions and the other demanding membership ratification of collective bargaining agreements—were both defeated in New Orleans. But these proved to be only temporary setbacks for the rank-and-filers.

In 1973, after the national leadership had negotiated a tentative collective bargaining agreement with the Postal Service, the NALC Executive Council sent the agreement out to the membership for ratification—which was accomplished by a vote of more than 2-to-1—even though there was no constitutional mandate. After this, incorporating membership ratification into the NALC Constitution was a formality which was accomplished in 1974 at the Seattle convention. There, the delegates also approved the regional election of the regionally based representatives—by then known as national business agents or NBAs.

In retrospect, these victories were major milestones on the road to transforming the NALC into a modern union but not the culmination of the process. In fact, it was not until 1978 that the members would take full advantage of the democratic procedures adopted at the 1972 and 1974 conventions.

Nevertheless, these earlier convention battles sent a message to postal management that in the future it would have to deal with the will of the entire NALC membership—a force the union's top leadership could not always control as the 1970 strike had demonstrated. This message could not have been more timely, for the Postal Service was intent on making letter carriers pay for their union's successes in winning wage rates comparable to those enjoyed by workers in the private sector.



‘KOKOMO IS DEAD!’

Almost from the beginning of the new, cost-cutting Postal Service, postal management had been determined to raise productivity. Managers soon put carriers under unprecedented pressure to deliver their routes at break-neck speed. Unresolved grievances piled up in response to this new speed-up. In fact, anger at the increased workplace pressure was at the heart of the opposition to the 1973 National Agreement—which was rejected by 31 percent of those voting in the first membership ratification of a contract.

The main test was yet to come. In April 1974, postal management announced it would begin a pilot work measurement system called LCRES—Letter Carrier Route Evaluation System—which would make the scientific management experiments of Frederick Winslow Taylor and others prior to World War I seem benign by comparison. To be tested first at South Kokomo station in Kokomo, Indiana, the “Kokomo Plan”

In April 1974, postal management announced it would begin a pilot work measurement system—LCRES—which would make the scientific management experiments of Taylor and others prior to World War I seem benign by comparison.



RETIREED MEMBERS

From the earliest days of the NALC, many retired carriers have retained their membership in the union, thus passing along to future generations the history and traditions of both the craft and the union while also adding to the union's collective strength especially in the political and legislative arenas.

Like active carriers, retired letter carriers have long recognized that only through the union have they been able to successfully fight for and defend their benefits. But active members have also benefitted enormously from the contributions retirees have made to the union. For the more than half-century that the 1939 Hatch Act limited the political rights of working carriers and other postal and federal workers, retirees played an essential role in furthering the union's legislative objectives—a role they have continued even after the 1993 reform of the Hatch Act substantially relaxed restrictions on working carriers' political activities.

The contributions of NALC's retirees have long been acknowledged by the union, and at the union's golden anniversary convention in Milwaukee in 1939, delegates established the practice of presenting Gold Cards to carriers with 50 years of membership. At subsequent conventions, additional honors were created for carriers retiring with between 55 and 75 years of membership. Moreover, to encourage carriers to maintain their NALC membership in retirement, delegates to the 1956 national convention created a lower national dues structure for retirees.

But despite the historically high regard the union had shown for its retirees, the advent of collective bargaining following the 1970 strike led some retired members to fear that the union might ignore their interests. After all, since the Postal Service was not legally required

to bargain over retiree benefits and, as a consequence, the union's time and resources would be devoted to negotiating the wages and working conditions of its active members, who would speak for retired letter carriers?

This line of thought led retired members to demand their own voice in union affairs through an elected national officer concerned solely with the needs of retired members. The position of Director of Retired Members limited to retired members was overwhelmingly approved at the 1976 Houston convention. Three primary duties were assigned to the newly created position: to provide information and service to retired members and those members nearing retirement; to monitor legislative issues of particular concern to retired carriers; and—as a national officer not covered by the Hatch Act—to administer COLCPE, the union's political action fund.

In the decades since the position was created, the Director of Retired Members' responsibilities and constituency have grown substantially. Today the Director heads a Retirement Department serving more than 89,000 retired members, including more than 13,000 Gold Card members and more than 8,500 women, a number that will continue to grow due to the influx of women into the carrier workforce in the previous half-century. The Department maintains a toll-free number to provide retirees and survivors access to both general and individually based retirement information, much of it obtained through regular contacts with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and other federal agencies. It also monitors retiree-related legislative proposals and plays a leading role in the expansion and operation of COLCPE. Retirees are kept up to date through the Department's page on the NALC website, the Director's *Postal Record* column, and informational pamphlets. Nonetheless, a substantial number of NALC members, when retiring from the Postal Service and no longer requiring protection on the workroom floor, do not continue their union membership, failing to understand the union's role in preserving their benefits as retirees.

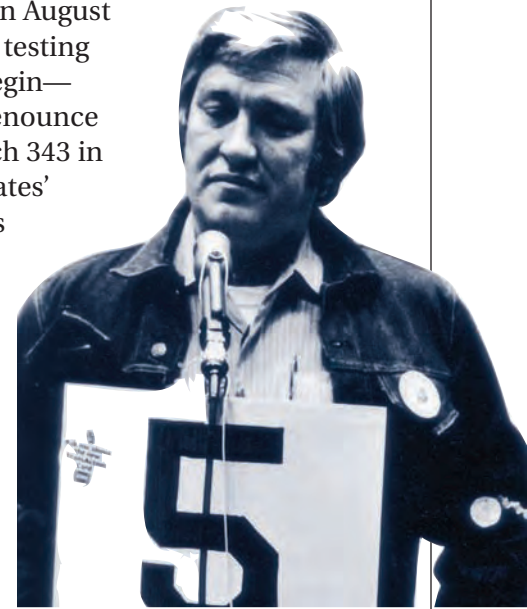
(as LCRES soon came to be known) was to be introduced in every station in the country—if judged a success by management.

The “Kokomo Plan” involved establishing work and time standards for each letter carrier function. These would be put into a computer which would then determine an eight-hour route for each individual carrier. Two letter carriers from Branch 36 who visited Kokomo after the Service began testing the system in November 1974 described what they saw:

The efficiency experts measured and timed how far a carrier walks to and from the time clock, and how he walks in pulling his case. The distance the carrier's arm moves in casing a letter was noted. They even measured to the split second the time it took for the carrier to move his eyes from the letter to the case and the time it took for the carrier to move his eyes from the case back to the next letter. At this rate, if you sneezed, you could be charged with delay in the mail.

To letter carriers, the announcement of the “Kokomo Plan” was virtually a declaration of war. At the NALC’s national convention in Seattle in August 1974—three months before the testing at Kokomo was scheduled to begin—speaker after speaker rose to denounce the plan. A delegate from Branch 343 in St. Louis summed up the delegates’ anger and fear: “Brothers, if this system is allowed to be implemented, letter carriers are going to be reduced to nothing but automation, and letter carriers aren’t robots, they are human beings.” In the end, the delegates—well aware that a postal strike would be illegal—voted to authorize NALC President Rademacher to call a nationwide strike if the Postal Service implemented LCRES and “if it is not to the liking of the letter carriers.”

The Service’s testing of LCRES soon began, first in Kokomo in November 1974, and then in Rose City Park station in Portland, Oregon in February 1975. The situation at Rose City Park was



Branch 36 President Vincent R. Sombrotto at the microphone at the Seattle Convention in 1974. Below, a teller counts delegates standing for a vote.





A Branch 82 carrier continues delivering his route in Portland, Oregon in 1975, ignoring the Postal Service's time-and-motion expert who is recording the carrier's every action as part of the Service's testing of the infamous "Kokomo Plan."

especially appalling. After 38 letter carriers had been tested for eight months, nine carriers had transferred, three had retired, two were disabled and one had died. In all, close to half of the original work force was gone in less than a year—a situation which prompted one Portland carrier to write: "For 1976 we hope and pray that our national officers will be successful in receiving a ruling by the arbitrator to have the Kokomo plan disallowed, so that carriers will again be treated as humans instead of robots and we will have a return to better service."

The Portland carrier's prayers were eventually answered. NALC had demanded arbitration of the LCRES dispute on September 9, 1975—one day after the Postal Service had announced that it was converting LCRES from a test to a permanent program at Rose City Park station. A Memorandum of Understanding which the postal unions had negotiated with the Postal Service during 1975 bargaining clearly permit-

ted the union to delay any attempt by postal management to implement as a permanent program new national work and time standards until an arbitrator had determined that the standards themselves were "fair, reasonable and equitable." And NALC President James Rademacher clearly believed that LCRES

was far from "fair, reasonable and equitable." Rademacher also reasoned that if by some cosmic miscarriage of justice, the arbitrator did rule against the union, then the NALC could still call a strike to prevent the Postal Service from implementing the system.

The arbitration hearings began in November 1976. NALC counsel argued that by adopting predetermined time standards for each work function, the Postal Service had unilaterally increased the work load of letter carriers, thereby violating the National Agreement. Moreover, the system itself placed carriers under unbearable physical burdens. The arbitrator issued an interim decision on July 8, 1976, prohibiting management at the Rose City Park Station in Portland from forcing carriers to work overtime. One month later, on the eve of the NALC's national convention in Houston, the full award was announced: LCRES was in violation of the National Agreement. The NALC position was upheld, and convention

delegates roared their approval as President James Rademacher announced, “Kokomo is dead.”

REBUILDING THE LEGISLATIVE MACHINERY

The union’s attention to workplace issues—a natural outgrowth of both the advent of collective bargaining and the more aggressive stance of the new, “business-oriented” Postal Service—for a time masked the fact that many issues affecting letter carriers were still being determined in the halls of Congress. But in the somewhat heady and certainly contentious days immediately following the Postal Reorganization Act, this was not readily apparent to many union leaders. The leadership no longer systematically lobbied the Congress, once the only means of improving letter carriers’ wages and working conditions, believing that

decent and secure working conditions could be won through collective bargaining alone. No longer, as in the years before the Postal Reorganization Act, did NALC even attempt to mass letter carriers together in giant pay rallies or grind out thousands of pieces of mail to members of Congress. In fact, by the mid-1970s, the powerful Doherty and Keating legislative machinery had all but withered away.

By this time, however, the national leadership began to realize that legislative issues were still of vital importance to the union. Having negotiated two collective bargaining agreements with the Postal Service, they were now more aware than ever before that the lack of the legal right to strike was a severe restraint on their ability to negotiate a contract that would be satisfactory to a still restive membership. Bills legalizing the right of postal employees to strike and granting the postal unions some form of union security—which at the minimum would require that even non-members pay the unions for the

NALC President Rademacher (back to camera, c.) testifies on the Postal Subsidy Bill in 1975.





NALC President J. Joseph Vacca (third from left) and other postal union negotiators face management as bargaining for the 1978 National Agreement begins.

JOB PROTECTION



representation they were receiving—had languished in the Congress as the NALC turned its back on the legislative process. Furthermore, certain letter carrier benefits and protections, such as the workers' compensation program, Federal Employees' Health Benefits Program, and the Civil Service Retirement System, were federal law and thus subject to congressional attack. Union leaders also began to realize that the collective bargaining rights postal employees enjoyed were themselves a product of congressional action—and what Congress could give, Congress could certainly take away.

Once union leaders recognized that Congress would continue to be instrumental in the fight for better pay, working conditions and benefits, they took the first steps in what would prove to be a lengthy process—the rebuilding of the NALC legislative machinery. In March 1975, NALC launched a Legislative Liaison Network designed to build an extensive network of members who would write their congressional representa-

tives. The NALC Executive Council took an additional step on July 21, 1975, when it formally christened the small political action fund the union had established the previous year as the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education—COLCPE—with the aim of “determining and implementing programs to collect voluntary funds” and the responsibility of dispersing these “contributions to, or expenditures on behalf of, candidates for federal elective office.”

In retrospect, it is clear that these steps were just the beginning, for the results were, at first, meager. Relying exclusively on appeals at various union meetings and regular exhortations in union publications, union leaders were unable to convince the membership of the importance of contributing to the union's political action fund. In the 12 months ending March 31, 1978, COLCPE raised only about \$70,000. The Legislative Liaison Network itself was more of a paper expression of what should be done than a smoothly functioning grass-roots operation. Appeals to write Congress were issued—and responded to—from time to time by a constantly changing cadre of legislative liaisons, but during this period, NALC's grass-roots efforts never reached beyond a relatively small number of activists. Most members of the union—and even many local leaders—remained indifferent to legislation.



HERO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The 2013 NALC Heroes of the Year

Walking their routes daily on virtually every street in the nation, letter carriers have often been the first to arrive at the scene of an accident, disaster or crime—and the first to offer assistance. They have also frequently been the first to notice and respond to a community problem: families without food, senior citizens alone at holiday time, substance abuse among neighborhood youth.

NALC established the Hero of the Year awards in 1974 to pay annual tribute to letter carriers who risk their lives to save the lives of others. A new award—the Humanitarian of the Year—was initiated in 1978 to honor carriers who make sustained personal contributions to the betterment of their communities. In 1986, the union announced the establishment of a Branch Service Award to recognize an NALC branch involved in an on-going community service program. A fourth category—special Carrier Alert Rescue—was created in 2002 to honor letter carriers who, due to their alert observations of conditions and people on their routes, save customers' lives.

Judges representing the labor community, community service organizations, and emergency public services review items published in *The Postal Record's* "Proud to Serve" column and select the annual winners.

To focus public attention on not only the award winners but also the thousands of other letter carriers who deliver more than the mail, the NALC began in 1985 to honor the Heroes of the Year with an annual reception in Washington, DC. NALC officers, members of Congress, the postmaster general and other USPS officials, and AFL-CIO leaders have joined the heroes, their families and their branch presidents at the official ceremony.

Every effort is made to publicize the Hero of the Year reception as well as the individual stories of the award winners. The event itself is taped for transmissions to TV stations in the heroes' home cities, and local, regional and national print and broadcast media outlets are informed. Voice and video interviews are also distributed to radio and television outlets.



Above, a member tends to a woman he helped evacuate from a house fire in 1993.

Rick Sforza, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

This combination of indifference and concern was generally unproductive. The union was able to protect the Private Express Statutes guaranteeing the Postal Service's monopoly over letter mail and to stall efforts to bring all postal and federal employees under the Social Security system—but these congressional attacks on carrier benefits were rare and mounted with little enthusiasm by their supporters. On the other hand, the union lost the one percent addition to retirees' cost-of-living adjustments and was unable to enact legislation which would keep the public service subsidy, restrict the right of postal management to curtail service, improve the retirement program, or amend the Hatch Act. These defeats underscored the union's inability to mobilize a politically sophisticated army of grassroots volunteers.

But the national leaders' lack of success in rallying the membership to support the union's legislative agenda was not surprising. The internal political turbulence unleashed by the strike of 1970 had not yet abated. Only when the reins of power had passed to a new group of union leaders would the NALC be able to fashion an effective legislative program.

TRIUMPH OF THE RANK- AND-FILERS

By 1976, the forces of change let loose by the strike of 1970 had changed the NALC markedly. The union had substantially strengthened itself by adopting internal constitutional reforms. In its dealings with the Postal Service, the union was developing new skills in grievance handling and contract administration.

And the union was at least beginning to recognize the importance of establishing a program to deal with the major legislative issues of the day. These developments, as significant as they were in the evolution of the union, were not enough to heal the wounds the strike had opened.

Tired of the continual turmoil, President James Rademacher announced that he would not seek re-election in 1976. Controversial during his term of office, Rademacher nevertheless led the NALC through the transition from an "association" with few rights in the workplace to a labor union empowered to bargain collectively with its employer. He skillfully negotiated three collective bargaining agreements with the Postal Service, thus setting the standards upon which his successors could build in the years ahead. Moreover, Rademacher left a legacy of fairness and integrity, for he oversaw the implementation of the democratic reforms which the membership had demanded.

Recognizing that the forces for change were, in the long run, irresistible, he graciously accepted what he could not prevent and thereby eased the NALC's transition into a new era. Upon his retirement, even those who had long opposed him paid him tribute, for none could deny James Rademacher's commitment to the working letter carrier.

Rademacher was succeeded by the incumbent Executive Vice President J. Joseph Vacca, who, in the fall of 1976, defeated Branch 36 President Vincent



R. Sombrotto in a hotly contested election. Vacca's narrow margin of victory foreshadowed the difficulties he would face as growing membership criticism of the union's inability to redress workplace conditions adequately had now passed to his shoulders. For example, members and branch officers were outraged by a

national negotiations between the postal unions and the Postal Service in 1978. Under pressure to gain substantial improvements in wages and working conditions, Vacca faced a postal management which came to the bargaining table with a number of "take-away" demands including the elimination of the no-layoff clause that had



Branch 36 members picket in July 1978 in Washington, DC as part of a rally in support of NALC's negotiating team.

report that of the 3,022 grievances submitted to arbitration from mid-1975 through mid-1977, the NALC had lost 87 percent. To many, this was a sign of a lack of leadership on the part of the new administration. Adding to the dissatisfaction of the rank and file was a grievance backlog—itsself a result of continued management harassment and workplace pressure—which was causing substantial delay in resolving workplace disputes. At the same time, the union was experiencing a financial crisis which was, at least in part, a result of the decline in the number of letter carriers employed by the Postal Service.

The union's internal difficulties were the backdrop against which Vacca faced his first major crisis—the

first been negotiated in 1971. In the agreement reached during the early hours of July 21, 1978, union negotiators settled for three annual wage increases of two, three and five percent each plus a cost-of-living provision which "capped" the payment of the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) at the amounts payable during the previous contract—regardless of how high inflation might actually rise. Despite a number of significant changes in the provisions of the contract pertaining to working conditions—the guarantee of two 10-minute breaks and additional protections in route examination procedures, for example—the members were dissatisfied by both the pay package and the capped COLA and, for the first time, used the

ratification procedure to reject an NALC-negotiated contract.

The union resumed negotiations with the Postal Service, but the talks quickly deadlocked. The parties then agreed to bring two issues—the pay package and the no-layoff clause—to a hybrid dispute resolution process called “mediation-arbitration” which held out the possibility that the parties might still reach a negotiated settlement. Harvard University Professor James J. Healy functioned in this dual capacity of mediator-arbitrator and on September 15, 1978—after less than two



weeks of “mediation” failed to achieve a settlement among the parties—Healy assumed the role of impartial arbitrator. In deciding the two issues, he clearly took

a middle of the road position. Healy removed the cap on the COLA, increased the annual wage increases slightly, and relaxed the no-layoff clause to allow the Postal Service to terminate employees with less than six years of service (although also providing lifetime job security for those carriers and other postal employees who were working for the Postal Service when the decision was issued).

While the arbitration award could be viewed as an improvement over what the parties had originally negotiated, the entire collective bargaining process left considerable political wreckage in its wake. The rejection of what the membership obviously con-

sidered an unacceptable agreement, the arbitration of only two issues rather than the entire contract, and, finally, the fact that an outsider had determined the wages and the extent of letter carriers’ job security—all this increased the membership’s concern about the effectiveness of the existing leadership. In the national election held during and after the “mediation-arbitration” process, Vincent R. Sombrotto, still the president of Branch 36 in New York, defeated Vacca by a vote of 75,137 to 43,407. The wide margin of victory helped propel into office most of the candidates running on the Sombrotto slate, many of whom defeated incumbent officers.

Sombrotto’s victory, the culmination of a process which had begun at least as early as the 1970 strike, was the final triumph for the rank-and-file forces. Forged by the fires of militancy the strike had ignited, these men and women fought throughout the 1970s for the reforms and the issues which made the new president’s election possible. Without the “one-man, one-vote” national elections, the membership ratification of collective bargaining agreements, and the emphasis upon management harassment and speed-ups, Sombrotto and his supporters would not have catapulted to national office in 1978.

In another sense, however, the triumph of the rank-and-filers was simply the latest stage in the union’s continuous struggle to improve the rights of letter carriers. Sombrotto, himself a student of NALC history, was aware of the union’s long heritage. But the new leadership also recognized that it would be judged by its ability to shape the future. Unified within, with a continued commitment to the rights of letter carriers, the NALC prepared to face the future with confidence.

1979-1989

ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF CHANGE



Installed in January 1979 as NALC's sixteenth president, Vincent R. Sombrotto took the helm of a union deeply affected—some would say weakened—by the previous decade's turbulence. With the union deeply in debt, Sombrotto immediately called upon the membership to put the union back on a sound financial footing. Members responded by approving overwhelmingly a monthly assessment on top of the regular dues. For its part, the new administration slashed expenses, cutting back severely in virtually every area. This combination of additional revenues and reduced expenditures turned the union's balance sheets around, and by spring of 1980, the union was in the black.

The union also suffered from internal divisions. The recent election had swept from office a number of longtime national officers, and their supporters were, at the very least, dubious that the new president could administer the union as effectively as he had criticized those who had previously held national office. Adding to the potential for continued divisiveness was the fact that the new administration included officers who had supported first James H. Rademacher and then J. Joseph Vacca during the 1970s. At the same time, a contentious lawsuit arising from the Postal Service's failure to observe the overtime pay requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act—New Deal legislation regulating private sector employment practices extended to postal employees in 1974—was pitting one group of members against another.

The new administration's goal in the FLSA case was to find a solution that would treat all carriers equally, not an easy task since only a portion of the membership, those who had joined the private lawsuits previously settled, had received a financial benefit from the case. In February 1979, NALC found a legal mechanism which allowed its general counsel to intervene in the ongoing litigation to represent the interests of the thousands of letter carriers not part of the private lawsuits. After almost four years of legal maneuvering, a federal judge in October 1982 approved a comprehensive \$400 million settlement of the case. The settlement fulfilled the union's mission of achieving "equal treatment" for all carriers by securing payments based upon the same formula used earlier to settle the private lawsuits.

Internal divisions and financial woes were not the only hurdles facing Sombrotto upon assuming the presidency. The turmoil of the 1970s had prevented the union from developing the staff and administrative resources necessary to meet its responsibilities to the membership in the more complex workplace environment that the Postal Reorganization Act created. This disarray was

symbolized by a backlog of 6,000 unresolved national-level grievances resulting from deteriorating labor-management relations, the increased work pressures pervasive in the reorganized, businesslike Postal Service, and a cumbersome grievance procedure. In fact, the grievance procedure

was so cumbersome that during the 1978 contract negotiations it was replaced by a new system.

But the backlog survived the inauguration of that new procedure. To reduce it, the new administration instructed the union's national business agents to meet with their Postal Service counterparts to resolve as many as possible of the pending grievances, an effort that was only partially successful. In early 1980, the NALC and the Postal Service entered into "Operation Shakeout," a crash program in which specially appointed teams of union and management representatives reviewed the thousands of still-existing grievances to try to resolve as many as possible and withdraw those lacking any merit. Only those cases where the parties could not reach agreement were to be appealed to arbitration. By the summer of 1980, "Operation Shakeout," plus another intervention by the national business agents, had all but eliminated the national-level grievance backlog.

This grievance backlog was symptomatic of a larger problem confronting the NALC. The advent of collective bargaining, particularly the policing of a nationally negotiated contract with a multi-step grievance-arbitration procedure, had added heavily to the burden of the union. Since grievances alleging non-discipline violations of the contract could wend their way up to Washington, the national union was, to a large extent, functioning as an enormous local union.

Concentrating its energies on what were often local grievance problems prevented the national union from doing what only it was in a position to do—focus on the institutional Postal Service issues affecting all letter carriers. Most of these issues were being determined in Congress where NALC was no longer the force it had been in earlier times. The job confronting





Flanked by the massive legal record of the Fair Labor Standards Act litigation, still in process, NALC President Vincent R. Sombrotto explains to a 1980 press conference the union's goal of "equal treatment for all carriers." Also shown are Executive Vice President Tony R. Huerta and Vice President Frank Conners (far right).

Sombrotto and his fellow officers was to determine which tasks and responsibilities could best be handled by NALC's branches and regional offices. Then the national union could tackle not only bargaining table issues, but also those concerns of both active and retired carriers still determined by the Congress.

LEGISLATION TO THE FOREFRONT

In the mid-1970s, NALC leaders had recognized that although the union had acquired the right to bargain collectively for its membership, a strong and influential presence in the halls of Congress was still imperative. Attempts to rebuild the powerful grassroots lobbying organization that had functioned during the Doherty and Keating years began at that time. The union also formed its political action committee—the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education, or COLCPE—to raise funds for contributions to friendly congressmen and senators. But these efforts had met with little enthusiasm from

the membership. By 1979, NALC's legislative program was still an idea whose time had not yet come.

This changed dramatically during the next few years. Recognizing that the effectiveness of NALC's Washington-based lobbying efforts depended heavily upon the union's "grassroots" legislative activity, the Sombrotto administration acted to make a grassroots network a reality. The network was built from the bottom up. Active legislative volunteers were recruited to work with an appointed legislative liaison in each congressional district. In turn, legislative liaisons reported to a state legislative chairman—almost always the state association president. This entire network was coordinated by the national union, which provided training and communicated the latest legislative developments to the field by mail and telephone. By the mid-1980s, the entire network numbered over 10,000 volunteers capable of rapid response to calls from the national union for assistance.

Building an effective grassroots lobbying network was only part of the task confronting the union. By the late





Thousands of NALC leaders enter a Washington, DC hotel ballroom to rally against “universal Social Security” in February 1983.



1970s, it was clear that influence in national politics required contributions to Congressional campaign funds. Since its creation in 1975, COLCPE, NALC’s political action committee, had been noticeably unsuccessful in raising the amounts of money necessary to do this. To raise more money, the union turned to direct mail. Buoyed by its experience in 1979 and 1980 when the union’s WAR (Win-A-Sure Retirement) campaign netted almost \$900,000 in 11 months to preserve the independence of the Civil Service Retirement System, the union expanded and refined its techniques for its first direct-mail COLCPE campaign. That campaign—“Budget Battle ’81”—raised over \$250,000. By the mid-1980s, COLCPE

was one of the most successful political action committees in the country, raising more than \$1 million nearly every year.

Ironically, the effectiveness of NALC’s legislative efforts was most evident in a campaign which was, in the end, unsuccessful. In late 1982 and early 1983, Congress put on the fast track a bipartisan legislative program to “reform” Social Security. Among other actions, postal and federal employees—protected since 1920 by the Civil Service Retirement System—would be brought under the Social Security umbrella. Concerned that this would leave working letter carriers without adequate retirement protection while eroding

the CSRS benefits of those carriers already retired, NALC pulled out all stops in an attempt to derail the “universal Social Security” train. President Sombrotto testified before numerous congressional committees, and the union regularly delivered comprehensive background information to congressional offices. Advertisements presenting the union’s case were purchased in newspapers throughout the country, and NALC members were asked by letter and telephone to urge their congressional representatives to vote against “universal Social Security.”

This activity culminated in late February 1983 in a giant legislative rally in Washington, DC. Nevertheless, a few weeks later, Congress passed and President Ronald Reagan signed the Social Security Reform Act which, although leaving existing letter carriers under CSRS, mandated Social Security coverage for postal and federal employees hired on or after January 1, 1984. Despite this result, the magnitude of the union’s efforts convinced many in Congress and elsewhere in government

that the NALC had become a true political and legislative force—a force which could not be ignored. This perception would serve the NALC well during the remainder of Reagan’s first term and throughout his second. Time after time, the union successfully repelled attempts to increase the cost of health benefits for both active and retired letter carriers; to reduce carriers’ retirement benefits; and, with one exception, to eliminate the cost-of-living adjustments retirees received.

LABOR- MANAGEMENT CONFLICT—AND COOPERATION

Vincent R. Sombrotto faced his first round of national collective bargaining in 1981 under pressure to negotiate a contract acceptable to a membership whose expectations he had helped to raise during the previous decade. He was

also confronted by a postal management emboldened by the anti-labor posturing of the Reagan administration. Management’s “get-tough” stance was revealed immediately. In mid-April, one week prior to the opening of the 1981 negotiations, the Postal Service, contending that the existing multiple craft structure made bargaining too “complicated,” asked the National Labor Relations Board to determine the “appropriate” bargaining unit or units before it would begin negotiating. Finally, in June, the full Board upheld an NLRB regional director’s earlier rejection of the Service’s move, and negotiations began—two months late and in an atmosphere poisoned by the Service’s machinations.

Against this backdrop, the NALC committed itself to retaining the “uncapped” cost-of-living adjustments—since the “capping” of COLA in the 1978 negotiations had been the major reason letter carriers had rejected that negotiated contract. Late in the 1981 process,



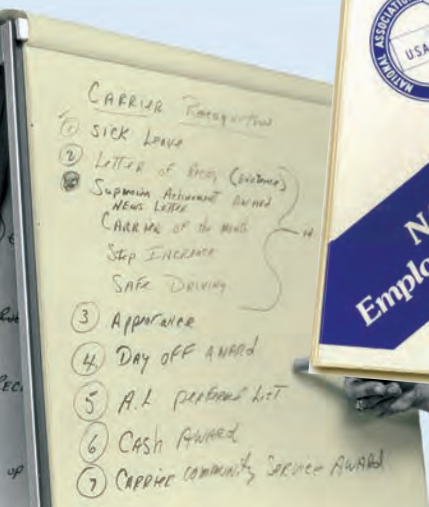
With the 1981 negotiations deadline only a few weeks away, letter carriers picketed post offices throughout the country in response to management’s stalling tactics.

management proposed freezing wages and capping COLA. In response, the NALC and its bargaining ally, the American Postal Workers Union, picketed post offices throughout the country and then augmented local action with a rally in Washington, DC. There the leaders of the unions made it clear that the membership should be prepared for any eventuality if a satisfactory agreement was not reached by the contract deadline. Finally, management relented. In the early hours of July 21, 1981, the unions and the Postal Service reached an agreement which retained the uncapped COLA, provided wage increases and eliminated mandatory route inspections, a long-sought goal of the union. Letter carriers throughout the country registered their overwhelming approval of the contract, ratifying the pact by a 6-to-1 margin.

Despite NALC's success at the bargaining table, relationships between the union and the management were in disarray at all levels of the system. The workplace pressures which had erupted in the 1970s continued as grievances

protesting harassment and violations of the contract by management mounted. Even outside observers were depicting labor-management relations within the Postal Service as unnecessarily adversarial and postal management as rigidly authoritarian.

Joint recognition by top postal management and NALC's national officers of the necessity to improve relations took concrete form in the spring of 1982 when the parties established a committee to devise a joint process to reach the workfloors of postal facilities throughout the country. Taking its cue in part from similar cooperative processes in the private sector, the committee—now called the NALC-USPS National Joint Employee Involvement Committee—agreed that its goal should be to improve the quality of the working lives of both carriers and their supervisors. It then created a structure revolving around facility-based, 8- to 10-member work teams of carriers and their supervisors which would meet regularly to discuss workplace problems and possible solutions. In September 1982, Sombrotto and

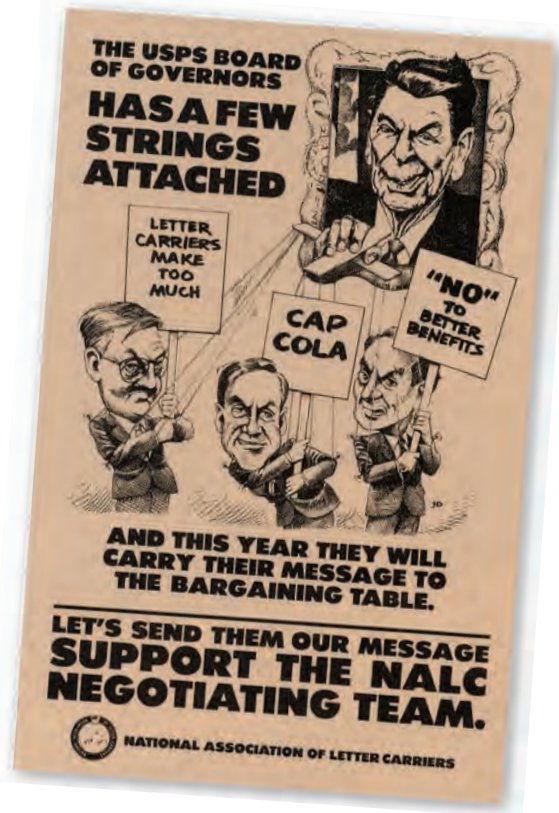


An Employee Involvement work team of carriers and their supervisors discusses work-related problems.

Postmaster General William F. Bolger signed a joint statement setting forth the goals of this new joint Employee Involvement—or EI—process. The first work teams and EI facilitators were trained in early 1983, and by the end of the year, work teams and local joint steering committees—NALC-USPS local oversight committees—were functioning in 17 localities. EI was clearly planted and growing. What impact it would make was still an open question.

It soon became clear that EI was neither a panacea for all the ills of the Postal Service nor had the emerging spirit of cooperation on the workroom floor affected the relationships between the NALC and the Postal Service at the highest levels. Even before the 1984 national negotiations began, the postal Board of Governors—the Service’s policy-making body of part-time political appointees—indicated that the Governors and not postal management would be calling the shots. These shots, the Reagan-appointed Board majority made clear, would be aimed at the pay of letter carriers and other craft employees. Once negotiations began, the Postal Service proposed freezing or reducing virtually every benefit and establishing a “two-tier” workforce. This new tier was to be composed of low-paid employees who would receive only a few benefits. When management refused to budge from its hard-line stance, successful negotiations were doomed. Shortly after midnight on July 21, 1984, negotiations broke down. For the first time since postal reorganization, a third-party arbitrator would decide the terms of an entire contract.

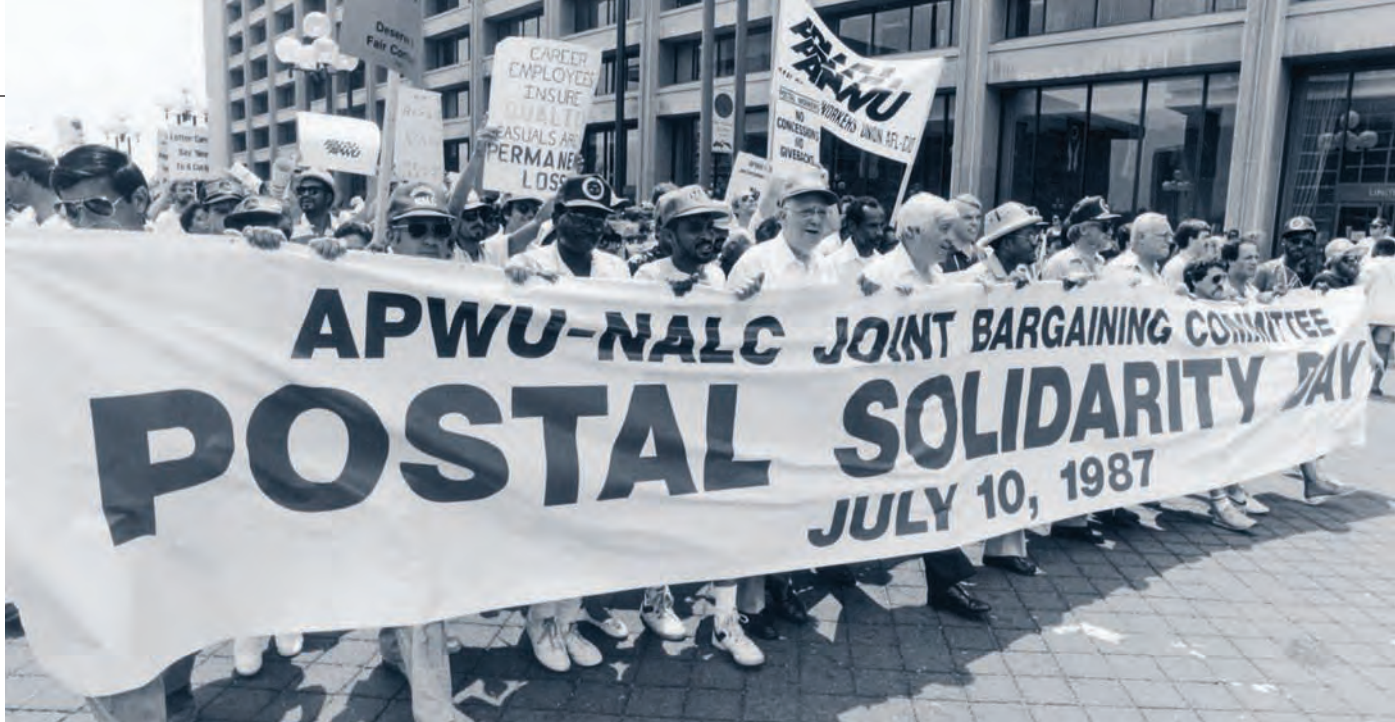
The arbitration hearing was held in Washington, DC in December 1984. Scores of witnesses were examined and cross-examined, hundreds of exhibits were introduced and thousands of pages of testimony compiled. Finally, on December 24, impartial arbitrator Clark Kerr and four “arbitrator advo-



The arbitration panel which resolved the 1984 contract dispute deliberates prior to issuing its award. At far right is impartial arbitrator Clark Kerr. To Kerr’s right is NALC General Counsel Bruce H. Simon.



ates” resolved the largest interest arbitration case ever conducted in the United States. The decision granted significant wage increases, retained the “uncapped” cost-of-living adjustment, and rejected the Service’s call for reductions in benefits in almost every area in the contract. However, in rejecting the Service’s proposal for a “two-tier” wage structure, the arbitration panel



NALC and American Postal Workers Union leaders march in front of Postal Headquarters in Washington, DC during the closing days of the 1987 negotiations.

stretched the single structure to include lower “steps” for new workers.

For the unions, the arbitration award was as great a victory as could reasonably have been expected. Still, the NALC recognized that the panel had added lower rungs to the pay ladder. Equally important was the fact that the contract had been fashioned by an arbitration panel, and not the parties themselves. This was a blow to the

collective bargaining process that the NALC did not want to see repeated.

But if the stalemated bargaining and subsequent arbitration of the 1984 contract was the low point of labor relations in the period following the Postal Reorganization Act, there were still reasons for optimism. First, the Postal Service was now well aware that the

arguments it had made with unrestrained confidence at negotiations had not persuaded an impartial third party. Arbitration had been a costly experience for the Service—one the Service itself would try to avoid in the future. Second, the NALC-USPS Employee Involvement process had survived the acrimony and name-calling that had pervaded both negotiations and the arbitration. In fact, the entire EI apparatus—work teams, steering committees, facilitators—functioned with only occasional interruptions throughout the last half of 1984.

That EI had outlasted the bitter process of creating the 1984 contract suggested that perhaps the next round of bargaining might be conducted with more candor and less hostility. Such proved to be the case in 1987 when the Postal Service bargained far less contentiously than it had previously. Despite substantial differences between the Service and the unions—chiefly over postal management’s call for the creation of a low-paid, part-time workforce—the parties reached agreement just hours after extending the deadline. NALC members ratified the proposed agreement overwhelmingly. Collective bargaining in the Postal Service was still viable.



PREPARING FOR NALC'S SECOND CENTURY

The final years of NALC's first century saw the union grappling with how best to fulfill the union's historic mission of serving the interests of letter carriers in the years ahead—years that would begin NALC's second century. This process of self-definition was in part a continuation of activities and processes begun earlier in the 1980s. Yet the union was also acknowledging that the challenges ahead were of a different order—and thus demanded different responses.

The central problems confronting the NALC at the end of the decade were the very same as those confronting the Postal Service. To a degree unprecedented in the Postal Service's history, the belief that the United States required a nationwide public institution to provide uniform mail service at uniform rates came under attack. Some of those leading the charge were ideological advocates of one or more "privatization" theories. These individuals wanted to reduce the size and scope of a public Postal Service, if not eliminate it altogether, on the assumption that the private sector of the economy could always outperform the public sector.

Other critics of the Postal Service—many of them speaking for large business mailers—were less sweeping and more

targeted in their attacks. In their minds, rates were too high and rate increases too frequent, postal management bloated and incompetent—and postal employees overpaid and underworked.

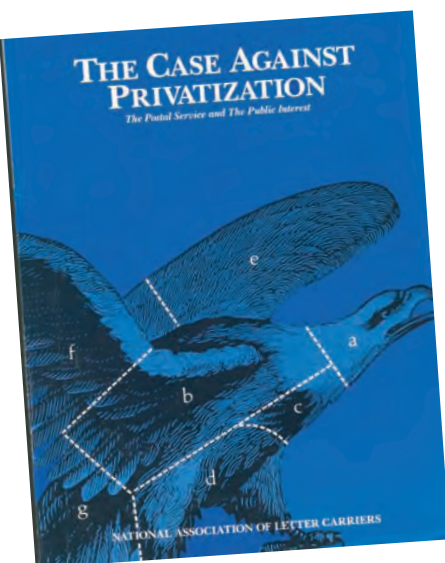
For the NALC, these criticisms—whether motivated by ideology or self-interest—focused attention on what the union's role should be when the very legitimacy of its sole employer was under intense scrutiny. The union's responses were several: first, by the late



1980s, it was clear that improved labor-management relations were essential. Recognizing that adversarial relationships and practices persisted at the local level despite the beneficial impact of the Employment Involvement process, Sombrotto and Postmaster General Anthony M. Frank agreed in 1988 to push the joint effort to improve the quality of work life more directly into the arena of labor-management relations. Union and management representatives were directed to reduce substantially the kinds of behavior leading to grievances and related adversarial activity during the coming fiscal year. By mid-1989, the parties were well on their way to reducing the grievances themselves. Whether carriers and their supervisors would, through the EI process, be able to

NALC President Vincent Sombrotto (right) and Postmaster General Anthony M. Frank sign a document in 1988 committing both parties to reducing grievances and other adversarial activity.

USPS photo



NALC AND THE MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY ASSOCIATION

A striking example of letter carriers' strong commitment to serving their fellow Americans beyond just delivering the mail is NALC's decades-long efforts to raise funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association—a nonprofit organization combating neuromuscular diseases through programs of worldwide research, comprehensive medical and support services, and education.

NALC became MDA's first national sponsor in 1953. That fall the union conducted the "Letter Carriers' March for Muscular Dystrophy" featuring the union's "porch light brigade," the name attached to those carriers who repeated their appointed rounds late at night. Letter carriers collected \$3.4 million, and ever since have raised additional millions for MDA.

For many years, the highlight of NALC's participation was the union's live appearances on the annual Jerry Lewis MDA Labor Day Telethon, with a top national NALC officer in the spotlight. From 1986 through 2011, the Telethon also recognized the most successful fund-raising branches in different membership categories, and, for a number of years, an Auxiliary representative.

After the 2011 Telethon, MDA changed the name of the broadcast to "Show of Strength," shortened the length of the broadcast, and began to air taped segments provided by its sponsors. NALC has used this opportunity to call attention the union's commitment to MDA and to recognize the top fund-raising branches.

The dollar amount NALC announces on television each September is the product of such branch activities as raffles, golf tournaments, bingo nights. The union has also developed nationwide programs. In 2009, the union began an annual "Bowlathon," and in 2011, NALC initiated an annual "Fill the Satchel" fund-raiser where carriers, often in uniform and carrying their satchels, stand at busy streets, holding signs and accepting donations from people in passing cars and pedestrians.

In recognition of the role branches playing in raising funds for MDA, the national union and MDA each year take representatives of the top fund-raising branches on an MDA-related trip.

From 1986 until 2011, NALC members from the top fund-raising branches in various membership categories appeared live on the MDA Labor Day Telethon, often along with the NALC president.

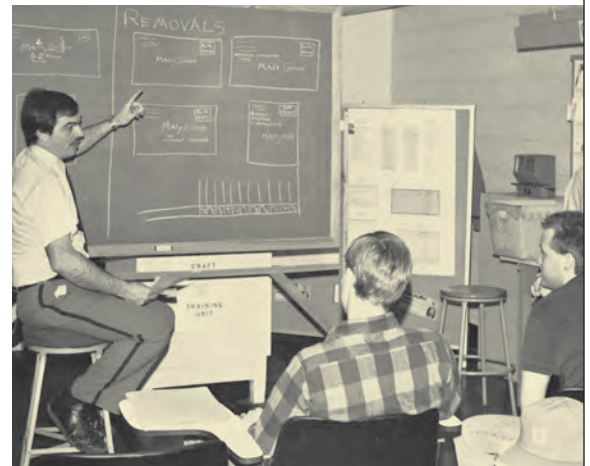
change the kinds of behavior that had prompted grievance activity was still an open question.

By this time, it had become obvious that if the Postal Service were to survive and prosper, the NALC and the Postal Service at the highest levels of both organizations would have to work together on a variety of workplace and non-workplace issues. That this might be achieved had been demonstrated when the parties successfully conducted a joint legislative campaign in December 1987 and early 1988.

The Reagan administration and the Congress had agreed to a budget resolution which, while preventing the Service from raising rates, would force the USPS to cut services and all but halt its capital spending program. NALC and the Postal Service, joined by other postal organizations, pulled together to fight this move. Together Sombrotto and Postmaster General Preston R. Tisch visited congressmen and senators to explain the postal community's positions. As a result, Congress scaled back the Reagan administration's proposals substantially, although still forcing the Postal Service to reduce services and postpone some construction projects.

Less visible than this union-management legislative effort was NALC's recognition that if letter carrier work was to change because of the automation of postal operations, the NALC should be a partner in redesigning and restructuring





the work of carriers. An outgrowth of the 1987 negotiations, a joint task force to study all aspects of carrier work—from equipment to the design of routes to the method of determining compensation—began work in the spring of 1989. With the task force's recommendations perhaps months, if not years, away, carriers could at least be assured that for the first time their union would be a partner in managing and directing change—rather than simply reacting to it.

But cooperation with the Postal Service, both on the workroom floor and on Capitol Hill, was only one of NALC's strategies to preserve the Service and, as a result, the jobs and benefits of letter carriers. By the end of the 1980s it was obvious that only a strong, stable and professional organization could successfully repel challenges to members' rights and interests by the Executive Branch, Congress or the Postal Service while simultaneously working with postal management to improve labor-management relations and defend the Service from external attacks. Fortunately, the NALC had already taken steps to prepare for this task.

Attempts to achieve internal stability began soon after Sombrotto assumed office in 1979. At the 1980 National Convention in Atlanta, the NALC Executive Council proposed extending the terms of national officers from two to four years. Although the convention delegates defeated the proposed amendment—reminding Sombrotto that he had opposed similar amendments when vying for national leader-

ship—delegates to the San Francisco convention two years later passed an identical amendment. No longer would officers begin campaigning for their next term immediately upon assuming office. For Sombrotto and his fellow officers elected with only occasional opposition during the decade, the amendment recreated the stability that had marked NALC politics before the 1970s. But whether stability would lead to stagnation as the amendment's opponents had charged remained an issue only time would decide.

Sombrotto and his administration now turned to the task of achieving long-run financial stability. After acrimonious debate, delegates at the 1984 convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, approved an amendment establishing a "minimum dues structure." Dues would now increase as carriers' wages rose. Thus NALC presidents would not be forced to ask convention delegates every two years for additional funds to pay for the union's increasing expenses.

But a growing NALC bank balance would be worthless unless the union

could improve its capacity to respond to the critical issues facing both the Postal Service and letter carriers. This the union did during the remainder of the 1980s. Staff was added in such areas as contract administration, legislation, legal, communications, economic research, information services, computers, retired members services, and public relations, and the union's Washington, DC headquarters building was renovated to accommodate the new personnel. New publica-

tions were created, existing ones improved, and the union began to use videotape to communicate with the membership. With the talents of additional professionals, the union's operations became more sophisticated and effective, and the union's status within the labor movement grew.

The NALC had been represented on the AFL-CIO Executive Council since 1981 when Sombrotto's election as a Federation vice president gave the union a seat on the country's most important labor body for the first time since William C. Doherty served on the Council in the 1950s and early 1960s. But participation in the Federation was only one aspect of NALC's greater visibility in the labor movement. Internationally, the union became increasingly active during the decade in Postal Telegraph and Telephone



Participation in the nation's political process has been essential for the NALC to continue to protect the rights, benefits and economic security of letter carriers.





CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

If history is a continuous, if zigzagging, record of human existence, then from time to time there are markers that organize the past and give cause for celebration. NALC's Centennial in August 1989 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where the union had been founded 100 years earlier, was such an occasion. There, more than 5,000 letter carriers, retirees, auxiliary members, families and friends attended four days of commemorative activities to honor the past and learn from it.

Highlights of the event were the arrival at the opening ceremonies of a giant Centennial envelope sent during the preceding months to each of the 50 states in the union for ceremonial postmarking; a 12,000-square-foot historical exhibit that displayed nearly a thousand documents, artifacts, photographs, vehicles and uniforms evoking key events in

letter carrier and union history; educational seminars highlighting the past and the future of letter carriers; "The Letter," a 90-minute musical tour through NALC history that blended real events with elaborate fantasies and thought-provoking commentary on the role of the NALC and letter carriers in American society; a first day of issue ceremony unveiling a new stamp honoring letter carriers; and the dramatic close of the festivities directly across the street from the site of NALC's founding meeting where a bronze statue commemorating America's letter carriers was unveiled.

Specifically designed to be festive, the Centennial Celebration was also educational and reflective because only by understanding the past can the union properly prepare for the challenges ahead.

International—the Geneva-based group uniting worldwide unions representing postal and other communications workers which later, through mergers, became part of the larger, more broadly based Union Network International, or UNI. Closer to home, the union took a leadership role in both a union-dominated coalition which in 1985 and 1986 mounted a successful effort for tax reform, and the development of the Fund for Assuring an Independent Retirement—or FAIR—a group of postal and federal unions and employee associations whose legislative interests were far broader than its name would suggest.

That NALC's increasing prominence in the labor movement was largely in the area of legislation was hardly surprising since by the mid-1980s, the NALC had developed one of the labor movement's most effective grassroots lobbying organizations and arguably the most successful political action fund. But beginning in April 1987, the union took a giant step forward by establishing an educational program—"WIN," for "We're Involved Now"—to teach grassroots lobbying and politics to thousands of NALC and Auxiliary members throughout

the country. The 152 WIN workshops conducted by November 1988 also mobilized NALC members, principally retirees and Auxiliary members, to take an active part in the 1988 presidential campaign, and for the first time NALC members won delegate positions to a national political party convention.

Although still hampered severely by the 50-year-old Hatch Act's limitations on partisan political activity of postal and federal employees—limitations the union made substantial progress toward overturning during the late 1980s—carriers nevertheless recognized that participation in the nation's political process was essential if the National Association of Letter Carriers were to continue to protect the rights, benefits and economic security of letter carriers.





1990-2002

FACING REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

For well over a century, the job of a city carrier had hardly changed at all. True, carriers had switched from horse and buggy to motorized vehicle in the years since the beginning of city delivery in 1863. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1980s, carriers still cased all of their mail in the office before going out on the street. Changes in mail processing in the preceding decades, important in increasing the overall efficiency of the Postal Service, had largely bypassed the working lives of letter carriers.

As NALC began its second century, carrier work was revolutionized as optical character reading and bar code scanning technology allowed the Service to arrange the mail in the sequence of delivery. By the beginning of the 1990s, delivery point sequence mail, DPS for short, began to arrive at the carrier's case, resulting in the reduction of the amount of time carriers spent in the office while conversely expanding carriers' time on the street. Although the revolutionary changes in how carriers performed their work did not take place overnight and did not affect every delivery unit simultaneously, they affected labor relations on the workroom floor and at the negotiating table both positively and negatively. In fact, virtually every aspect of the relationship between the union and postal management felt the impact of DPS mail.



More than 1,000 NALC members participated in the AFL-CIO's massive 1991 Solidarity Day rally in Washington, DC in support of the American labor movement's goals.

For the NALC, there were two key issues: how would routes be structured as DPS made its slow but relentless entry into the workplace, and what role would the union have in shaping decisions concerning DPS before these decisions were made. These questions were answered almost immediately, as management adopted, without the union's involvement or consent, a program ironically called "route stabilization"—or "6 and 2." Under "route stabilization," management planned to readjust, prior to the implementation of automation, all the routes in an office to conform to what management believed would be the workload both in the office and on the street once the amount of DPS mail arriving in the facility reached management's target

figure. As a result, carriers' street time would be extended and office time reduced—as would be the number of regular routes in the delivery unit. Carriers would no longer case all the mail they delivered—"routers" would case a sizeable portion of the mail the regular carrier would then deliver.

As soon as "6 and 2" was introduced in test sites around the country in the late 1980s, NALC strongly objected, informing management that route stabilization would delay the mail, disrupt operations and create chaos and low morale on the workroom floor. This proved to be the case as starting times were moved back and carriers were compelled to deliver more and more mail later in the day or evening to increasingly disgruntled customers



In response to management's unilateral readjustment of routes prior to the implementation of automation, NALC formed "truth squads" twice in the 1990s to monitor the changes and ensure that branch representatives filed grievances whenever the adjustment did not conform to the contract.

unhappy with the reliability of their mail service.

As management proceeded to implement route stabilization over the union's objections and in the face of customers' complaints, the NALC realized it was time to draw a line in the sand. In December 1990 at his installation to a fifth term as NALC national president, Vincent R. Sombrotto announced that the union was forming a cadre of "truth squads" throughout the country to monitor route adjustments and ensure that branch representatives filed grievances any time management adjusted routes without conforming to the contract or those USPS manuals and handbooks that regulated route adjustments. The program itself—labeled "Best Efforts" as an offshoot of Sombrotto's remark that carriers should give the Postal Service their "best efforts" but no more and no less—spread throughout the country during 1991 and the first part of 1992.

Despite the success of "Best Efforts" in giving branch representatives and rank-and-file carriers the tools to resist management's efforts to deploy "6 and 2," no amount of logic or persuasion—or customer complaints—could deter management from proceeding with the program. Not until the issuance in July 1992 of a national-level arbitration award in a Hempstead, New York case did the dispute over route stabilization begin a slow and tortuous path toward resolution. The decision held that management could not re-adjust routes solely to anticipate the future impact of delivery-point sequencing. Yet the arbitrator's decision explicitly left critical issues for the parties to resolve themselves. This they successfully achieved in September 1992 by agreeing to six memorandums that established criteria for dealing with grievances involving past "Hempstead-type" route adjustments. At the core of

the memorandums were provisions halting all route adjustments based upon the anticipated impact of automation and an agreement that local management and NALC branches should reach decisions jointly on such key issues as case configurations during route inspections, the creation of so-called "X-routes" to be phased out when a set amount of mail prepared in delivery point sequence arrived in the delivery unit, and the hiring of transitional employees. This new category of worker was inserted over the union's objections into the 1990 contract by an arbitrator after management had claimed the need for temporary employees during the introduction of delivery point sequencing.

Sombrotto and management also agreed in late 1992 to give the approximately 30,000 part-time flexibles then on the rolls the opportunity to convert to full-time status. In the summer of 1993, the union and management again demonstrated the ability to work together by giving the more senior transitional employees an opportunity to acquire career status. The parties also incorporated what they had learned in the field about DPS implementation into a single memorandum that also provided that the union and management would jointly test modified route inspections and adjustments at selected sites already receiving mail in delivery point sequence. Building on an extensive training effort, joint route inspections were implemented throughout the country during the fall of 1993. Simultaneously, NALC and management met at the national level to resolve a number of issues of critical importance to the



At the 1993 Rap Session in Chicago, President Sombrotto and other national officers answer questions raised by carriers on automation issues including delivery point sequencing, part-time flexible conversions and the use of temporary employees.

NALC FOOD DRIVE

From the inception of city delivery in the nineteenth century, letter carriers have always demonstrated compassion toward their customers and their communities. Perhaps the most visible and far reaching example has been annual NALC National Food Drive—a venture the union launched in the early 1990s, and which quickly became one of the most significant examples of volunteerism in America.

Prior to the union inaugurating a national drive, a number of NALC branches had collected food for the needy locally on different days during the year. Drawing in part on lessons learned from Phoenix Branch 576's highly successful drive, the national union decided to hold a pilot drive in October 1991 on the same day in 10 cities. This proved so successful that it was expanded into a nationwide effort. Input from food banks and pantries, however, suggested that late spring would be a better time because most food banks start running out of the donations received during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday periods. A revamped drive was organized for May 15, 1993—the Second Saturday in May—with amazing results. More than 220 branches collected over 11 million pounds of food as letter carriers from Alaska to Florida, from Maine to Hawaii, collected the donations while delivering their routes.

Over the years, the NALC Food Drive has been benefitted greatly from the support of many groups, especially Campbell Soup Company, the Postal Service, Feeding America (formerly America's Second Harvest), United Way of America and local United Ways, the AFL-CIO Community Services network, and, more recently, AARP. In addition, noted cartoonist Bil Keane and, later, his son Jeff, have donated artwork based on their famous "Family Circus" cartoon characters to promote the NALC Food Drive.

In a typical year, letter carriers in well over 1,000 NALC branches in more than 10,000 cities and towns in all 50 states and U.S. jurisdictions typically provide at least 70 million pounds of food to over 5,000 community food banks and pantries, making the NALC National Food Drive the nation's largest annual one-day drive.

By 2014, twenty-one years after the inaugural NALC National Food Drive, letter carriers had collected a total of more than 1.3 billion pounds of food to be distributed to the nation's needy, underscoring the union's historic commitment to serving their customers and communities.



implementation of DPS, including the question of how many bundles certain carriers could carry.

Unfortunately, the Service's duplicity soon became evident as management abandoned agreements it had previously reached while also crafting new proposals the union could never accept. First, the Service walked away from its agreement to give career opportu-

nities to transitional employees and then tried to force NALC to accept additional transitional employees in the city carrier craft. Not only did the union aggressively resist management's efforts, but the bad feelings the Service engendered led to a breakdown of the ongoing negotiations over the rules and guidelines to govern the introduction of delivery point sequencing into the carrier workplace. In fact, once management fully understood the union would not agree to an expansion of the transitional employee workforce, it reversed itself on a number of other DPS-related issues where agreements had been reached, including the joint determination of which routes would be eliminated due to automation. Management also sent to the field in March 1994 DPS implementation instructions that unilaterally changed jointly agreed-upon interpretations of the six September 1992 memos and also unilaterally changed, without proper notice, specific handbooks pertaining to work practices. In sum, management decided to implement DPS without the NALC's participation and partnership.

The NALC immediately responded by filing national-level grievances challenging the Service's implementation instructions and also announcing the creation of new "Truth Squad" training to update the successful 1990 "Truth Squad" route inspection program aimed at monitoring and challenging management's actions in the field. Moreover, the union continued to maintain that to reduce, if not virtually eliminate, missed deliveries and "non-deliveries" inevitably resulting from an imperfect mail processing automation

program, carriers should case DPS mail until the volume was such that it would be inefficient and counter to the thrust of the Service's automation program for the carrier to continue casing this mail.

Management refused to deal with this issue, and in late February 1996 ended abruptly and emphatically any discussions with the NALC about how best to shape the USPS automation program. The Postal Service's disdain for the contributions of the union and its members was hammered home just two months later when management unilaterally withdrew from the 14-year joint Employee Involvement process, an act NALC protested to both the Postal Service and Congress.

Management's increasingly hostile attitude toward the union, coupled with its "go-it-alone" practices in adapting carrier work to the automation of mail processing, continued into the mid- and late 1990s. In fact, in 1996, the Postal Service laid the groundwork for a massive violation of the collective bargaining agreement by unilaterally beginning to plan, and in some cases implement, a number of test studies and pilot programs.

Although employing different names and different statistical methods, the entire effort was most commonly referred to as "Delivery Redesign" and focused on three related goals: how carriers should be managed, how an eight-hour day should be defined and how letter carrier work should be organized. Essentially, the Service wished to combine old-fashioned time-measurement studies designed to devise a time value for every possible physical movement of a letter carrier in the office and on the street—an updated version of the ill-fated Kokomo experiments of the 1970s—with a related approach that derived numerical values from existing data on carrier performance and route structures in order to reorganize carrier work. The

NALC immediately recognized that management was attempting to divide the membership and weaken the union by testing and unilaterally polling carriers to obtain information that could eventually speed up carrier work and undercut the union's ability to defend its members. Immediately the union responded, informing both branch leadership as well as rank-and-file members of management's plans and encouraging carriers, especially those who were being tested, to band together to resist any attempts by their supervisors to prod them to violate safety regulations or otherwise ignore the "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" principle enshrined in the collective bargaining agreement.

Largely in reaction to the union's resistance, management stepped back from its plans to unilaterally introduce new work standards and practices. In October 1997, the NALC and the Postal Service agreed to jointly test how to change carrier work to meet the future needs of the Service and the inevitable changes in the mail environment resulting from the explosion in electronic communications and commerce. Although specifically stating that the union was not approving management's Delivery Redesign programs or any tests management was implementing unilaterally, the compact recognized that for the Service to be efficient, productive and competitive, "it is in the interests of both management and the union that the parties work cooperatively." Two months later, the NALC Executive Council appointed branch presidents and rank-and-file carriers to a joint union-management task force to explore possible changes in the structure of letter carrier work.

The Service's disdain for the contributions of the union and its members was hammered home in 1996 when management unilaterally withdrew from the 14-year joint Employee Involvement process.





Letter carriers delivered an urgent message to the public nationwide on June 19, 1996: Mismanagement is ruining the Postal Service. Above, President Sombrotto joined Washington, DC Branch 142 members in an informational picket. Top right, Branch 36 members ignored wind and rain to demonstrate in New York City.



leaders to reach mutually agreeable local solutions. Only after headquarters management intervened and the NALC filed grievances did local managers toe the company line and cooperate with local union leaders.

RESOLVING CONFLICT AT THE WORKPLACE

If the October 1997 accord demonstrated the willingness of the Postal Service at the national level to cooperate with the union, managers in the field continued to resist including the union in decisions affecting how letter carrier work would be adapted to the new realities of DPS. This became obvious when, with carriers now wrestling with separate bundles of DPS mail and the mail they still cased, a national arbitrator ruled in the NALC's favor by limiting the number of bundles carriers in certain circumstances would have to carry but left to the parties the responsibility of implementing the award. In response, NALC and management agreed to jointly study the relative efficiency of various work methods. Recognizing it would take time to complete the study, the parties directed local union leaders and their management counterparts in the interim to select the most efficient approach to handling the problem, but local managers ignored the agreement and refused to work with NALC branch

If during the 1990s, USPS Headquarters management occasionally reached out to NALC's national officers to ease the introduction of automation in the carrier workplace, local postmasters and supervisors in many units remained autocratic and adversarial. Management abuse, long pervasive in many facilities, only increased as pressure to "make the numbers" to recoup the outlays for automation grew. As a result, the violence of historic proportions that began in the mid-1980s continued into the early 1990s, with the 1991 tragedy in Royal Oak, Michigan that took the lives of four supervisors and seriously wounded four craft workers having the greatest fallout. Partly this was a matter of timing, since it was the latest in a string of tragedies. More important, supervisory harassment in Royal Oak had clearly been intolerable, as even the most disinterested observer was forced to admit.

The Postal Service finally, if reluctantly, admitted that no matter how

emotionally unstable the perpetrators of violence might be, the undue stress and tension in too many postal facilities had contributed to the violence that had erupted over the previous several years—and that could occur again. As a result, in late 1991, the NALC, the Service, two of the three other postal unions and all three supervisory organizations began meetings that led to an agreement the following May to issue a statement Sombrotto had essentially drafted con-

fronting head-on the underlying problem of management abuse. By signing the “Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace,” management acknowledged in black and white that it would take direct action to remove from their positions those individuals—management and craft employee alike—responsible for harassing, threatening or bullying employees.

The lofty words of the Joint Statement and those of subsequent

NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

Although the NALC was founded in 1889, the union’s first official national convention was not held until the following year when almost 70 carriers from 48 different branches gathered in Boston as a single nationwide letter carriers’ organization. Until 1903, the union held national conventions annually, but since 1905 conventions have been held biennially. The only exception was the 1945 convention, which was postponed because of World War II. Biennial conventions resumed in 1946 and the 2014 national convention in Philadelphia was the union’s 69th convention.

National conventions serve several purposes. First and foremost, the convention is the union’s supreme governing body since delegates debate key issues, adopt resolutions and amend the national, state and branch constitutions. Convention

debates have shaped the course of the union—for example, to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor, to prohibit racially segregated branches and, in 1972, to provide for “one person, one vote” mail election of national officers instead of convention election and installation of officers, the union’s practice until that point. Delegates also set the union’s legislative agenda and, since the advent of collective bargaining in 1971, its negotiating priorities. Finally, although conducting NALC business is the convention’s most important activity, it is also a social gathering for the NALC family where delegates make new friends and renew old acquaintances.

The NALC’s 69 conventions through 2014 have been held in 39 different locations, ranging in size from small cities such as Scranton, Pennsylvania, Canton, Ohio, and

Grand Rapids, Michigan in the early days of the union, when only a few hundred delegates were in attendance, to the country’s largest cities today. As the union has grown, so has the number of delegates, a natural result of the constitutional provision in effect since at least 1894 that allows each branch to send one delegate for each 20 members

—a provision which has been interpreted to allow one delegate for those branches with fewer than 20 members and an extra delegate each time the 20-member bar is crossed. With over 8,000 delegates attending recent conventions, only a limited number of cities can accommodate the union, with even fewer having union facilities, a concern of the NALC Executive Council that now selects convention sites.

Today, NALC’s national conventions are large and complex affairs held in enormous convention centers utilizing state-of-the-art audio-visual technology. In addition to the general sessions, educational workshops and social events enhance delegates’ convention experience.



agreements had limited impact, for the Postal Service refused to take action against supervisors and postmasters who threatened carriers and other craft workers. Although at first the NALC could do little to rid postal

By signing the “Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace,” management acknowledged in black and white that it would take direct action to remove from their positions those individuals responsible for harassing, threatening or bullying employees.

workplaces of abusive, if not necessarily violent, supervisors and postmasters, in August 1996 a national arbitrator ruled that by agreeing to the “Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior,” management had assumed a contractual obligation subject to the grievance-arbitration procedure. As a result, in appropriate cases of management misconduct, arbitrators could order the Service to remove supervisors

from positions where they supervised carriers or other craft workers. In the years that followed, NALC branches filed scores of “violence and behavior” grievances at the local level, and a number of arbitrators directed the USPS to remove supervisors from positions supervising carriers and other craft workers.

The NALC recognized that moderating the behavior of abusive managers was only one element, admitted-

ly an important one, in creating a less contentious and stressful work environment. Another was that in too many facilities, management violated the collective bargaining agreement repeatedly, forcing NALC branches to react by filing grievances. In these workplaces, grievances usually were pushed up the ladder, often to arbitration, thus creating backlogs of thousands of grievances. Justice was delayed and thus denied, simultaneously infuriating letter carriers and emboldening managers.

Resolving workplace disputes at the local level quickly—as well as preventing them from surfacing in the first place—had long been a union objective. From the late 1980s on, the union encouraged joint experiments in the field to create new dispute resolution systems to resolve grievances fairly and expeditiously with the hope that the local parties would learn how to avoid problems in the future and thus develop a better relationship. An alternative dispute resolution process—the outgrowth of both the earlier experiments and top-level union-management discussions prompted by a 1994 Government Accounting Office report critical of postal labor relations—was tested beginning in the late 1990s and, with then-Executive Vice President William H. Young shepherding and shaping the process for the union, more than met the expectations of its proponents.

The process had two major goals: to resolve grievances more quickly, thus reducing the number of arbitrations clogging up the system, and to achieve greater contract compliance, thereby decreasing the number of incidents or occurrences giving rise to grievances. In essence, the grievance-arbitration procedure was reduced to two resolution steps prior to arbitration, with joint NALC-USPS dispute resolution teams charged with resolving grievances once

Efforts to end management’s repeated violations of the collective bargaining agreement were a major focus of the 1997 Rap Session in Chicago.





the local parties had failed to do so. The success of this system was not inevitable, for without a common understanding of the collective bargaining agreement, management and the union could find themselves mired once again in the grievance-arbitration procedure. In 1998, the parties produced the *Joint Contract Administration Manual*—JCAM for short—containing authoritative, agreed-upon interpretations of the National Agreement that clarified contract language previously misunderstood and helped the joint resolution teams as well as NALC stewards and front-line managers resolve many disputes that earlier would have blossomed into grievances. However, it was only when the alternative dispute resolution system was transformed into a new Article 15 in the 2001-2006 National Agreement that the union reached the culmination of its lengthy struggle to ensure that justice was neither delayed nor denied.

AT THE BARGAINING TABLE

The impact of automation on the letter carrier workplace also dominated collective bargaining during the 1990s—with the NALC, led again at the negotiating table by Vincent R. Sombrotto, committed to protecting the working conditions of



letter carriers in a more stressful environment while also ensuring that carriers were fairly compensated for the additional physical and mental burdens they carried. For management, a lower-paid workforce with more part-time, short-term employees receiving fewer benefits was the goal. At each of the decade's three rounds of negotiations, all resolved by an interest arbitration panel after the parties were unable to reach agreements across the bargaining table, the Postal Service adopted a calculated strategy in support of its position on how automation should be implemented.

At the 1990 negotiations, management first tried to use automation as a club to beat down the wages and benefits of bargaining-unit employees and weaken NALC and its long-time bargaining partner, the American Postal Workers Union. As its "final offer," the Service put on the table proposals to increase the number of part-time flexibles in large offices and expand the use of casuals—both part of its "flexibility proposal"—and create a two-tier wage system by slotting new hires into a totally separate pay schedule with a starting wage—when inflation was taken into account—that equaled

Top: President Vince Sombrotto and

Postmaster General Anthony M. Frank exchange contract proposals as negotiations for the 1990 National Agreement begin. When talks failed and the contract went to arbitration in 1991, then-Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Bill Young helped make NALC's case (bottom).

Letter carriers gave the 1999 arbitrators a crash course in the “real world” of mail delivery in the automated Postal Service, including casing mail in delivery point sequence versus pre-DPS (right) and the challenge of handling multiple bundles of mail dressed for winter weather. Below, NALC members testified about USPS on-the-street observation.



postal wages in the late 1940s. In addition, management proposed reduced cost-of-living adjustments, one-time lump-sum payments instead of basic wage increases, and a cap on the Service’s share of health insurance premiums. The NALC and the APWU immediately rejected these proposals.

Although the arbitration panel that ultimately resolved the contract the following year did not accept management’s most onerous wage proposals for existing employees, the panel clearly demonstrated its sympathy for management’s desire for greater flexibility to accommodate the automation of mail processing by expanding the allowable number of part-time flexibles, and, more significantly, creating an entirely new category of temporary employee—transitional employees—to act as a “buffer” workforce until automation had progressed to the point that the Service could reduce its workforce.

The 1994 negotiations and the ensuing arbitration was a turning point in the NALC’s bargaining experience, for postal automation was creating an

insurmountable wedge between the union and the APWU, leading to sharply diverging positions on key workplace issues. At NALC’s Atlantic City convention in 1994, delegates decided the union should “go it alone” at negotiations, then just days away.

The wisdom of the delegates’ decision was validated at the 1995 arbitration that inevitably followed the breakdown of negotiations when management insisted on eliminating cost-of-living adjustments, replacing wage increases with small one-time payments, eliminating step increases and other regressive and totally unacceptable proposals. At arbitration, the NALC not only vigorously opposed the Service’s “give-back” proposals but also called upon the panel to settle the contract “on the basis of those criteria that applied specifically to the letter carrier craft,” arguing that delivery point sequencing—and especially management’s refusal to allow carriers

to case DPS mail—had made the job of a letter carrier far more difficult, and, as a result, carriers should be upgraded from Grade 5 to Grade 6 on the wage structure.

The arbitration panel was persuaded by many of the union's arguments, but unfortunately sidestepped a number of automation-related issues. The panel rejected most of management's demands, including those for lower starting salaries and the increased use of transitional employees while granting carriers wage increases in addition to one-time payments and continuing cost-of-living adjustments. Unfortunately, the panel denied carriers Grade 6 pay. Tellingly, the panel admitted that an upgrade should be favorably considered when DPS was fully implemented, itself an issue in contention between the union and management. Four years later the true significance of this language became apparent—significance far greater than was fully appreciated at the time of the panel's award.

In 1998, the union again bargained alone. Negotiations between the NALC and the Postal Service were cordial, but in the end money ruled, as management refused to grant the carriers appropriate wages increases. Yet despite the formal expiration of the existing contract, the parties continued bargaining for an additional 90 days and then entered into voluntary mediation. Still, management could not be persuaded to reward carriers adequately for what the union argued was a unique contribution to the Postal Service's bottom line performed under increasingly adverse circumstances.

As the mediator labored through the winter and into the spring of 1999 to persuade the union and management to resolve their differences over the economic package, Sombrotto sent a message to the Postal Service. He reached out to the union's members

who, in response, loudly endorsed NALC's position that, as a result of automation, they were working harder and under harsher conditions than ever before.

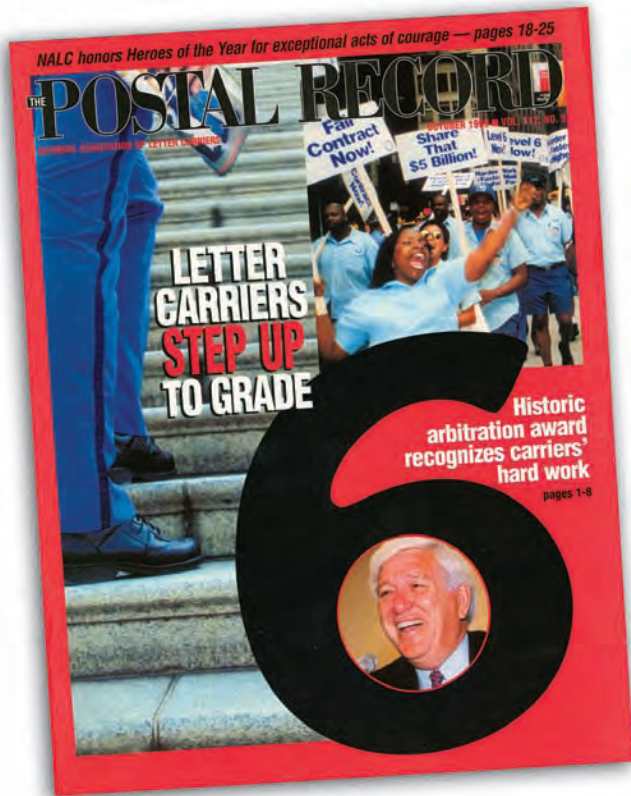
Once the mediator acknowledged that he was unable to bridge the differences between the parties, thus setting the stage for interest arbitration, the union took the next step—mounting a nationwide “in your face” public relations campaign that culminated in informational picketing in front of post offices throughout the country. The union's message, aimed at both the public and management, was direct: due to automation, carriers were working harder than ever and deserved to be paid fairly for their efforts.

When the arbitration hearings began in June, the union built its case around the language in the 1995 arbitration award suggesting that an upgrade to Grade 6 should be favorably considered when DPS was fully implemented—which NALC argued had now been achieved. Moreover, the union argued that carrier wages compared unfavorably with those of workers performing similar work for the Service's major competitors. The union's case, however, rested mainly on the contention that DPS placed greater physical and mental demands on letter carriers—which the union effectively proved through the testimony of a variety of outside experts, national officers and key staff, but especially the first-hand accounts and hands-on demonstrations of rank-and-file carriers.

Together these letter carriers educated the arbitrators about the physical wear and tear of extended time on the street, the great likelihood of injury—especially in inclement weather—the difficulties of balancing multiple bundles and carrying heavier loads



Informational picketing in June 1999 demanded a fair contract.



Postal Record cover at left celebrated historic 1999 arbitration decision that awarded Grade 6 pay to letter carriers. Above, contract talks for a 2001 National Agreement began with calls for a negotiated accord.

as well as additional problems—all a result of DPS.

Sombrotto himself testified twice before the panel, highlighting much of the previous testimony and arguing that the panel should “de-link” carriers from “inside” workers represented by other unions. “Historic parity must yield to present reality,” he said, adding that “otherwise you shackle one group of employees unfairly to the different problems faced by a different group of employees.”

Finally, in mid-September 1999, the panel issued an award that in addition to granting basic wages, continuing cost-of-living adjustments and improving health care benefits, elevated all Grade 5 carriers to Grade 6. Thus for the first time since city delivery began in 1863, the pay scales of carriers were divorced from those of postal clerks. NALC’s advocates, officers, staff, expert witnesses and especially rank-and-file letter carriers had convinced the panel that as a result of delivery point sequencing, carriers were working both harder and smarter under more difficult conditions than ever—and certainly hard enough to deserve an historic pay upgrade.

Perhaps as a result of the Grade 6 decision, in 2001 management approached negotiations for a new contract appearing to understand that interest arbitration was not without risks. Or perhaps a more cooperative attitude was prompted by the crumbling of the World Trade Towers on September 11, only a little more than



9/11/01

Like all Americans, letter carriers were deeply affected by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Although none of the NALC members with World Trade Center routes were injured, all had to cope with the knowledge that they would never see most of their customers again. At left, a Branch 36 member opens a relay box covered with homemade fliers posted by New Yorkers seeking word of missing loved ones.

API/WideWorld photo by Kathy Willens

two months before the expiration of the contract, as well as public anxiety about the safety of the mail stream after letters laced with anthrax, a potentially lethal bacteria, caused a number of deaths and illnesses only a few weeks later. Moreover, with DPS fully implemented and with automation no longer taking center stage, the most contentious issue of the 1990s was now quite literally off the table. Then too, the parties faced a common threat: the impact of the digital revolution cutting into mail volume and, to an even greater extent, revenue.

Whatever the reasons, bargaining for a new contract was by far the most productive in years, if not decades, and, after negotiations had been postponed for several months because of the anthrax attacks, in April 2002 the NALC and the Postal Service reached an agreement that not only included a fair economic package but also “codified” the alternative dispute resolution system the parties had been shaping and refining for several years. Equally significant, the contract’s term would run for an unprecedented five years, both an overt bid by the parties to create a period of stability during which they could work to strengthen the USPS’ long-term viability and a model for the other postal

unions that soon built upon the NALC’s accomplishment.

FROM PRIVATIZATION TO REFORM

By the time Vincent R. Sombrotto began his second decade as NALC president, the union had in place a sophisticated grassroots legislative and political network as well as a highly effective political action committee—the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education, better known as COLCPE. To the extent possible within the limitations of the 1939 Hatch Act restricting active postal and federal employees’ participation in national politics, the union’s grassroots operation worked to elect letter carrier-friendly members of Congress and communicate to elected representatives NALC’s views on legislation under consideration on Capitol Hill. COLCPE, too, was a remarkably powerful political weapon, drawing upon the voluntary contributions of active and retired members to contribute to political campaigns and thus gain a voice in the Congress when letter carrier interests were at stake. The entire legislative and



NALC’s legislative and political prowess beat back constant political attacks in the 1990s to undermine the Postal Service and decimate postal benefit programs. NALC President Sombrotto is shown testifying before the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee in 1995.

political operation was spearheaded by the union's national officers and staffed by three Washington-based legislative and political professionals, supplemented by five rotating legislative instructors who organized the union's grassroots field operations and trained activists. This blend of a Washington-based nerve center with vigorous membership support had enabled the union in the preceding decade to repel the vast majority of legislative attacks on carrier benefits and programs set by law.

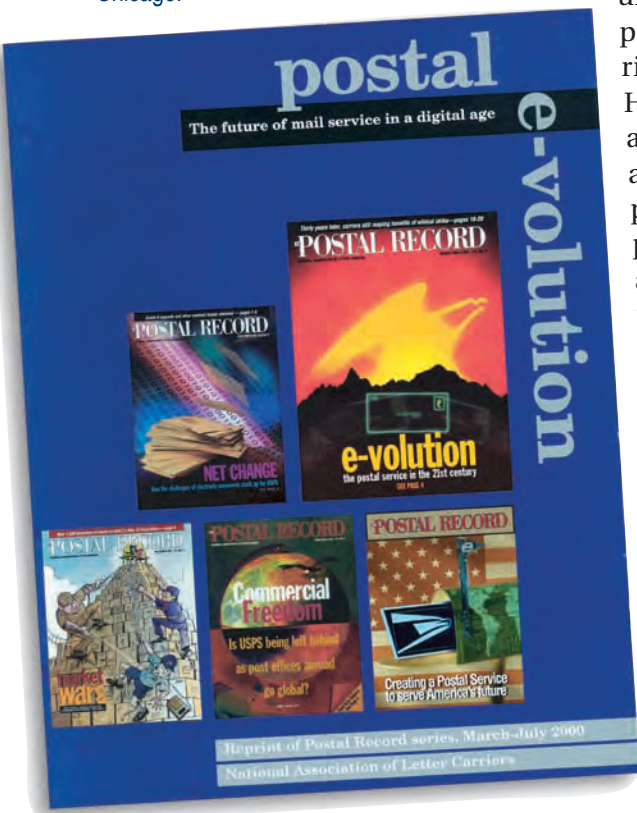
Despite the union's successes, constant political attacks on the Postal Service that undermined its finances and challenged its status as a public service and legislative threats to federal and postal benefit programs, especially those affecting retirees, prompted the union to renew its campaign to free active carriers from the 1939 Hatch Act limiting active postal and federal employees' participation in the nation's politics. Although active carriers could vote, Hatch Act restrictions prevented them from engaging in virtually all other partisan activities. The NALC had long championed reform, if not outright repeal, of the Hatch Act and had almost achieved this goal in 1976. The union's next best shot came in 1990 when, after



President George H.W. Bush vetoed reform legislation and the House had overridden his veto, the Senate fell two votes short. Not until 1993 was the union able to mount another serious run at Hatch Act reform. In September of that year, both houses of Congress approved legislation granting active carriers the right to work in partisan campaigns, hold party office, serve as delegates to political conventions and speak out for the candidate of their choosing. A few weeks later, President William J. Clinton signed the bill and Hatch Act reform was, at long last, a reality.

In retrospect, Hatch Act reform was just one step, although a significant one, in the continued development of the NALC's legislative and political apparatus, allowing the union to more effectively resist a revival of early assaults on the health and retirement benefits of postal and federal employees. "Un-Hatched" active members also helped the union combat renewed efforts to siphon off USPS funds to mask the ballooning federal deficit—a maneuver NALC, the Postal Service and other postal groups had

In 2000 *The Postal Record* published a five-part series examining the challenges facing the Postal Service in the 21st century. The series was compiled into a booklet distributed at NALC's 62nd Biennial Convention in Chicago.



been only partially successful in resisting. Although by the end of the decade, the government's budget was in the black and Congress had less reason to deplete USPS revenues, the Postal Service remained an easy target. Fortunately, NALC's legislative and political prowess beat back repeated efforts in the late 1990s by congressional representatives allied with the USPS' competitors to compel the Service to raise its prices as well as refrain from offering specific products to the public.

The passage of Hatch Act reform also enabled the union to turn its legislative attention to other issues besides combating repeated onslaughts by those hostile to worker interests, the USPS itself, or both. President Sombrotto was convinced that for the Postal Service to survive well into the 21st century, reform of the outdated Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 was a necessity. In 1994, he publicly called for new legislation—"Postal Reorganization II"—to replace the existing statutory

structure and grant the Service the commercial freedom to compete fairly with the private sector and sufficient regulatory flexibility to react to changing economic and commercial conditions.

Beginning in 1996 and continuing into the new century, various reform bills were introduced in the Congress, all sharing the common goal of providing the USPS with the pricing and product flexibility necessary to survive in an economy characterized by the rapidly increasing ability of citizens and businesses to communicate electronically and thus bypass the Postal Service entirely. Unfortunately, however, the Service's competitors and others hostile to the survival of a public postal service successfully blocked reform efforts.

In December 2002, as Vincent R. Sombrotto concluded his 24-year career as NALC's national president, the postal reform legislation he had first advocated and long championed remained an idea whose time had not yet come.



In honor of President Vincent R. Sombrotto's retirement, a special display of memorabilia surveying his career was on exhibit during the 2002 convention in Philadelphia. Right, a group of delegates shows their appreciation for his years of service to letter carriers.





2003-2014

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF A DIGITAL AGE

That the digital revolution was destabilizing the Postal Service and the union was obvious when William H. Young was installed as the NALC's 17th National President in December 2002. Beginning in 1998, electronic mail and electronic commerce were diverting high-revenue first-class mail volume from the postal mail stream. Yet with the Postal Service delivering to new addresses each year, additional strains were being placed on the Service's resources—and on letter carriers. What was crippling the Service, however, was the outdated Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 that limited the USPS' ability to compete fairly with corporate rivals. The union's support for legislation granting the Postal Service more flexibility and commercial freedom had not borne fruit when Young took office, and the future of the reform effort was uncertain. NALC was presented with a new challenge when George W. Bush created the President's Commission on the Postal Service days before Young's installation. Fearing the Commission would advocate the privatization of the Postal Service, the elimination of private express statutes and even the abolition of collective bargaining, Young drew a line in the sand in early 2003. He informed the Commission that NALC's support for reform legislation required the Service's gaining commercial freedom to survive in a challenging environment, while leaving intact the collective-bargaining process and the Postal Service's universal mandate to provide delivery to every household and business in America six days a week. When the Commission's report attacked the pay, benefits and collective-bargaining rights of carriers and other craft employees, the NALC quickly and loudly opposed the Commission's regressive proposals while acknowledging the report contained positive recommendations.

In early 2003, as the NALC parried with the President's Commission, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, acknowledging the Service had been "overpaying" its obligations to the Civil Service Retirement Fund, drafted legislation to recalculate the USPS' funding requirements. In support, NALC secured the assistance of its allies in the postal community, including postal management and organizations representing large mailers. The union also mobilized its grassroots legislative network to let Congress know its views. As a result, a funding reform bill estimated to save the Postal Service \$77 billion over 40 years emerged from Congress in late winter of 2003 and was signed by Bush that April.

Postal reform legislation did not gain the full attention of Congress until 2004. Young testified before House and Senate committees, but bills that passed both committees unanimously in the spring were never brought to the floor of the House or the Senate. Legislation was re-introduced in both chambers in early 2005, with the NALC, its grassroots legislative network and political action fund revitalized, well-positioned to influence the debate.

Ironically, electronic mail, one of the major threats to the Postal Service, proved to be a lifeline for the union. In 2003, soon after he assumed the presidency, Young created an electronic legislative network of "e-Activists" to receive e-mail messages on legislative developments. Through links to congressional offices, the network also enabled e-Activists to communicate the union's positions on key legislative issues to their representatives and senators. In the two years prior to the summer of 2006, Young sent 24 messages, mainly about postal reform and NALC-endorsed candidates, to over 72,000 e-mail addresses, with another 70,000 legislative activists mobilized by postal mail.

As committed as he was to employing technology to further the union's

legislative goals, Young recognized the value of "boots on the ground." In January 2006, he unveiled a new grassroots infrastructure—a "Field Plan" to enhance the legislative program the union had created in the early 1980s. Marrying NALC's grassroots lobbying with political activism, the union would work with elected officials on pending legislation and with candidates pledged to support the NALC. Like the earlier effort, the Field Plan placed congressional district liaisons, appointed by the state legislative chairs, in every congressional district. Under the new plan, liaisons would work with NALC's National Business Agents and state chairs on a broader agenda—organizing phone banks, recruiting volunteers for precinct walks, and managing get-out-the vote campaigns with state political parties and other unions. When the need arose, the network would mount demonstrations to call the public's attention to letter carrier concerns.

Since in politics money talks, Young understood that intermittent direct mail solicitations for the union's political action fund—the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education, or COLCPE—did not provide a consistent stream of contributions. Beginning in 2003, members could choose to contribute to COLCPE by payroll and annuity deduction and directly from checking accounts. A better-funded COLCPE would prove invaluable as Congress struggled to craft legislation satisfactory to the postal community and the Bush administration.

By late July 2005, the full House of Representatives had passed a reform bill, and a similar bill had been voted out of committee in the Senate. Although USPS' Board of Governors delayed Senate action with last-minute objections to a number of governance provisions, the Senate unanimously



In 2003, NALC created an "e-Activist" network to quickly generate e-mail messages updating legislative activists on the latest developments on Capitol Hill and to allow e-Activists to communicate NALC's positions electronically to their elected representatives. As of mid-2014, approximately 54,000 e-Activists were receiving some 30 messages a year, with approximately a quarter of the e-Activists contacting their representatives and senators when asked.

The evolution of NALC's activities since 1974, soliciting voluntary political contributions from the union's members, tracks the explosive growth and sophistication of political fundraising in general.

Spurred by the 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act defining how political action committees could operate, NALC formed a small political fund that year to raise voluntary funds to contribute to House and Senate candidates. The fund was formally named the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education, or COLCPE, the next year. At first, the union solicited contributions largely through announcements in the *NALC Bulletin* and *The Postal Record* as well as collections at NALC events, raising only a small amount of money—a solicitation in the August and September 1977 *Postal Records* garnering \$34,000 was COLCPE's most successful effort to that point. Normally, individual checks and envelopes with cash would arrive at Headquarters, where they would accumulate for weeks before being deposited.

It was not until 1981 that the union initiated its first direct-mail COLCPE campaign—"Budget Battle '81"—which raised over \$250,000. Subsequent direct-mail campaigns soon followed, and by the mid-1980s, COLCPE was raising more than a \$1 million nearly every year. But in July 2003, with political campaigns increasingly expensive and fundraising more sophisticated, the union was able to put into effect what it had first proposed at 1978 negotiations—a system for allowing voluntary contributions to be deducted automatically from active members' paychecks. This was followed the next year by provisions for automatic voluntary deductions from retirees' annuities as well as contributions directly from members' checking and savings accounts through electronic funds transfer.

Since 2003, the amount of money raised for COLCPE as well as the number of members contributing have both increased dramatically. Close to \$7 million was projected to be raised in the 2013-14 election cycle (calendar years), compared with \$1,390,000 in the 2001-2002 cycle, the last full election cycle before automatic contributions became available to NALC members. During the 2001-2002 cycle, over 17,500 active and retired members contributed to COLCPE, but for the 2013-2014 cycle, at least 30,000 members were projected to contribute to the union's political action fund, with well over 90 percent of the contributors utilizing one of the automatic contribution methods.

Of those members contributing to COLCPE, the percentage contributing via automatic deductions has increased every election cycle since 2003-2004, as has the average contribution, with more and more members embracing the union's "Gimme Five" program, created in early 2006, to encourage members to contribute \$5 each pay period. Nevertheless, for COLCPE to raise the ever-increasing amounts of money necessary to further the union's legislative goals, many more active and retired members must contribute automatically through payroll and annuity deductions as well as directly from their checking and savings accounts.



passed a reform bill in February 2006. Yet the union was not satisfied with either the House or Senate bills because the rate-setting mechanism limited future rate hikes to the rate of inflation. Because the bills had to be blended into one bill that could pass both houses of Congress and meet NALC's concerns, the union worked with House and Senate staff, mailer representatives and other stakeholders to forge by the end of September a compromise that included a process for implementing emergency rate increases above the rate of inflation and a one-time special proceeding to adjust postage rates before the inflation index went into effect.

The Bush administration then proposed provisions to tilt the interest arbitration process toward management's favor. Although these were defeated, the union rejected the bill because two provisions in the Senate bill unfairly singled out postal employees receiving workers' compensation. When one provision was dropped after the November elections, Young reluctantly decided neither to endorse nor oppose the compromise bill, and the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act became law in late December 2006. Despite its limitations, the bill protected bargaining rights for letter carriers and other postal employees, preserved the USPS in the public sector and retained universal service for the American people, funded by a regulated postal monopoly. The NALC president also assumed, as did Congress and virtually the entire postal community, that the legislation's limited pricing and product flexibility provisions would stabilize the Service's finances. Unanticipated circumstances and a largely overlooked provision dashed these modest expectations.

PRESERVING CARRIER JOBS

While Young was aggressively championing postal reform legislation, he was

faced with workplace issues arising from the impact of the digital revolution on USPS finances. As revenue decreased, management cut the number of postal employees, including city carriers who were delivering to more addresses. Routes became longer, overtime ballooned, and the carrier's job grew much more difficult—leading to heightened workplace tensions. Fortunately, the 2001-2006 National Agreement had incorporated the alternative dispute resolution process Young had earlier nurtured. By streamlining the grievance-arbitration procedure and giving the local parties the tools to resolve the bulk of their disputes themselves or with the aid of joint dispute resolution teams, arbitration became an alternative for only the most intractable problems.

Nonetheless, in some post offices, animosity on the workroom floor and between branch leaders and management created “war-zone” workplaces. Young recognized a more direct approach was needed. In 2003, the union and the Postal Service designed an “intervention” process that by the end of 2005 was helping local parties reduce workplace acrimony.

Historically, arguments about overburdened routes and whether route inspections and adjustments were conducted fairly had been the major sources of workplace tensions and local union-management conflict. As the number of routes declined because of postal automation and, beginning in the late 1990s, eroding mail volume, fair and

appropriate route inspections and adjustments were crucial. In early 2003, a national joint route inspection task force was formed to improve route adjustments and inspections. Although the task force reached tentative agreements, by early 2004 NALC had concluded local management was a roadblock to progress, and in April, Young negotiated an agreement to halt route inspections for five months so local parties could verify counts of cased mail.

With much of the mail arriving at the carrier's case in delivery point sequence, the union believed an entirely new method for inspecting and adjusting routes was necessary and that union must be involved in shaping and implementing the new method. At the union's National Convention in Honolulu in July 2004, delegates authorized NALC's Executive Council to build upon Young's idea that route adjustments be based on the average of letter carrier's street and office times over a specified period of weeks or months selected by the local union.

Although not endorsing NALC's approach, management agreed to work with the union to develop a fair process. In early August, the parties extended for a year the joint task force and the April moratorium on traditional inspections to allow local parties to develop joint methods to adjust routes as the national parties created a new USPS-wide system. Unfortunately, in December 2004 the Service

In testimony before the President's Commission on the Postal Service in late April 2003, NALC President William H. Young addressed labor relations and collective-bargaining rights.





Hundreds of NALC members, joined by a contingent of rural carriers, marched through Washington, D.C., on April 17, 2007, to USPS' headquarters to protest the practice of contracting out.

terminated the 21-month joint effort, reaffirming its position that any new process must incorporate the Delivery Operations Information System (DOIS), a highly subjective computerized mail measurement system the union had already rejected. In response, the union created a “Route Protection Program”—a reprise of the “Truth Squad” initiatives of 1991 and 1994—to help branch officers and stewards monitor management’s actions. Simultaneously, Young tried to revive negotiations for a fairer route evaluation system, but management rebuffed his efforts throughout 2005 and into 2006. As a result, when the parties opened negotiations in late summer of 2006, whether an agreement could be reached accommodating the additional physical and mental demands placed on letter carriers by automation and the digital revolution’s impact on USPS finances remained in doubt.



NALC’s main bargaining goals were clear: Win wage increases to reward carriers for their contributions to the USPS and find a way to evaluate and adjust routes accurately. The union also wanted to address the growing threat of Contract Delivery Service, a more insidious version of Highway Contract Routes. Young was blunt: If the Service wanted good relationships with the union, management would have to agree to substantial improvements in the contract’s outsourcing provisions. But NALC also understood management wanted relief from skyrocketing

health care costs and offered to discuss the creation of a letter carrier-only health plan within the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.

As talks progressed during the fall and progress was made on several route inspection issues, the parties recognized the sticking point was subcontracting. As an alternative to outsourcing, to accommodate management’s desire to cut costs, the union proposed

moving most carriers to a Monday-Friday schedule while creating a Saturday workforce of new carriers and retired letter carriers. It appeared a deal could be reached, but the Postal Service’s governing body—the Board of Governors—rebuffed any subcontracting limitations. Negotiations were extended briefly, but by early December, negotiations had broken down, and the union prepared for interest arbitration while informing the membership of the stakes in the outsourcing battle.

In late January 2007 in Los Angeles, 1,500 NALC activists heard Young describe how management had expanded outsourcing by increasing the use of Highway Contract Routes in 2005 for delivery work and then re-branded the program in 2006

as Contract Delivery Service to insert low-paid delivery into growing urban and suburban areas. Young announced the union would respond by aggressively enforcing contract provisions restricting subcontracting, strengthening these restrictions through interest arbitration of the new contract, and using congressional allies to pressure management to reverse course.

During the late winter and spring of 2007, waves of letter carrier activists swarmed Washington, D.C., bringing the union's messages to their elected representatives. The union also cranked up its relatively new e-Activist program to generate letters, e-mails and phone calls asking legislators to oppose USPS out-

sourcing. Young testified before Congress, and the union rallied in front of postal headquarters in Washington, sparking waves of rallies and protests around the country. This activism led to the introduction in the Senate of an outright legislative ban on, and bi-partisan majority support for a sense of the House Resolution opposing contract delivery. Facing massive political opposition on Capitol Hill and waves of negative publicity throughout the country, the Postal Service sued for peace and in June returned to the bargaining table.

Within weeks, the parties agreed to a five-year tentative contract that maintained the traditional pattern of wage increases and semi-annual cost-of-liv-

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

To equip the next generation of union leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the union's future challenges as well as enhance the capabilities of those already holding branch and state association leadership positions, the NALC initiated a national Leadership Academy in the summer of 2005. The first class consisted of 30 branch activists selected from a pool of more than 300 applicants, each sponsored by a local mentor—in most cases, their branch presidents.

Since that initial class, the union has brought two classes each year to facilities in the Washington, D.C.-area for three separate weeks of classroom learning spread over a sixth-month period. Between the sessions, students are expected to spend at least 80 hours of their time pursuing take-home assignments and special projects back home under the tutelage of their mentors—established NALC leaders such as branch presidents and national business agents who continue monitoring them after the conclusion of the formal program.

Retired national officers have coordinated the Academy's program and curriculum, tapping into the expertise of a number of NALC resident officers, Headquarters staff, and outside experts to teach classes on a variety of topics during the three weeks of formal instruction. Although the subjects have changed over time, staples include labor history, group dynamics, negotiating techniques, union finance and administration, effective teaching, postal economics, workers' com-



penation, contract interpretation, and strategic planning.

Although each week also emphasizes effective written and oral communication skills, the second week especially hones these skills, requiring written reports and oral presentations from students about their take-home projects. In addition, students are required to make repeated oral presentations to prepare them to perform in such forums as membership meetings, awards ceremonies and dinners. Although challenging for many participants, public speaking is a key skill for future union leaders.

The 16th Leadership Academy class graduated in December 2014, and the 17th class in June 2014, with additional classes scheduled for the future. In all, approximately 500 activists had graduated from the Leadership Academy by mid-2014.

Although many graduates have filled leadership roles both as officers at all levels of the union and in other union capacities, the Academy's main purpose is to provide students with the tools and information necessary to assist their local leaders in fulfilling the goals of the branch.



Postmaster General Jack Potter and NALC President William H. Young signed the 2006-2011 National Agreement.

ing adjustments. NALC reluctantly accepted a reduced employer contribution for health benefits based on the

pattern previously set by two sister postal unions. The contract also replaced casuals with bargaining-unit transitional employees to facilitate the implementation of the flats sequencing system, and it set the stage for the joint development of a new route evaluation system. But for Young, the most important accomplishments were the new protections against subcontracting, specifically a Memorandum of Understanding prohibiting contracting out of existing letter carrier work for the life of the contract and a ban on outsourcing new delivery in offices where only city carriers work. A second memorandum created a task force to develop a long-term understanding on contracting out and established a six-month moratorium on new delivery outsourcing

in offices otherwise not protected. In all, the contract contained the first new restrictions on subcontracting in more than 30 years, and in September 2007, the membership ratified the contract by a margin of 9 to 1.

USPS IN TROUBLE

As NALC negotiators preserved carrier jobs and the integrity of the bargaining unit, the Postal Service was facing financial problems the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 was not equipped to ameliorate and had, in fact, exacerbated. Although by late 2007, the economic downturn later dubbed “The Great Recession” was underway, although not apparent to either economists or the American public, the “postal recession” had started in mid-2007 as e-mail and electronic bill-paying cut into the volume of high-revenue mail. From January through March 2008,

PRESERVING NALC’S PAST



Although the history of letter carriers and their union reaches way back into the 19th century, it’s only been in recent decades that NALC has taken concrete steps to preserve the union’s records and artifacts to allow both members and researchers explore the history of one of America’s oldest labor unions.

Since the early 1980s, the union’s Information Center has maintained a comprehensive records system to safeguard NALC’s working papers and historic legacy. Toward this end, each year unnecessary or redundant files are destroyed and recent and vital records are routinely stored in a climate-controlled records storage area in the Headquarters building. Branch officers also receive information and training on retaining, storing, and correctly disposing of paper and electronic records.

Not all of the union’s records retained for possible use in the short term for legal and administrative purposes are deemed of historical importance. Those judged to have possible long-standing historical value for members and schol-

ars alike are shipped to the union’s official archival depository, the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University in Detroit, the union’s official archival depository since 2001 and widely regarded as the nation’s foremost repository of records of the American labor movement.

In many ways, NALC’s extensive collection at the Reuther Library is a legacy of the large, comprehensive exhibit at NALC’s Centennial Celebration in Milwaukee in August 1989, which displayed the union’s original historic documents, photographic and video images of letter carriers and union events, as well artifacts related to the history of letter carriers and the NALC. Many of these valuable historical materials are now located at the Reuther Archives where, augmented periodically by more recent materials sent from Headquarters, they are being professionally preserved for posterity, research, and future display by the NALC, the Archives, the National Postal Museum, and other museums for historic exhibits.

first-class mail volume fell 3.5 percent, steepest drop since the 9/11 attacks. Overall mail volume for all of Fiscal Year 2008 declined by 4.5 percent from the previous fiscal year—the worst decline since the 1930s. As the nation’s economic downturn became painfully obvious at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, the decrease in mail volume and thus revenue continued. Advertising mail dried up, and transactions volume fell sharply because the crisis had hit such mail-intensive industries as housing, real estate and banking. Overall mail volume plummeted by 24.2 percent from Fiscal Year 2007 to Fiscal Year 2010, with first-class volume declining at approximately the same rate. Postal Service employment, already decreasing, continued to contract, dropping by roughly 14 percent between mid-2007 and mid-2010, and the number of city carriers fell from 222,000 in March 2007 to under 210,000 three years later.

As the USPS’ financial condition deteriorated, a fatal flaw in the 2006 reform law became apparent. NALC knew the legislation would have to be amended—it was “too little, too late” since the postal industry was changing and Republicans in the 109th Congress had blocked many of the provisions NALC believed essential. Yet at the time of passage, NALC’s major concern was the unfairness of a workers’ compensation provision imposing on only injured postal employees a mandatory three-day waiting period before OWCP benefits could begin. What had not especially concerned the union nor most postal stakeholders was the requirement that the Postal Service “pre-fund” the health benefits of future retirees according to an amortization schedule requiring the Service to pay \$5.6 billion per year for 10 years. Hardwired into the law without regard to economic conditions, the pre-funding mandate was a burden no other com-

pany in the nation shouldered. This did not appear to be an immediate problem when the law was enacted. Postal revenues were increasing, and management was able to build the cost of pre-funding payments permanently into postage rates during the special rate proceeding authorized by the law to occur within one year of enactment. But as the nation’s economy fell apart in 2007 and 2008, the Service chose not to raise rates. As a result, the Service paid more than \$12 billion between the beginning of 2007 and the end of 2009 to pre-fund future retiree health benefits, turning its healthy balance sheet deep red.

For Fredric V. Rolando, who in July 2009 had assumed the union’s helm as its 18th president upon the retirement of William H. Young, confronting the postal financial crisis was his top priority. In September 2009, following a summer of grassroots lobbying led by NALC, Congress enacted a one-year \$4 billion reduction in the scheduled pre-funding payment, which helped the USPS survive the worst year of the Great Recession. Nonetheless, by early 2010, the Postal Service was still suffering the double-whammy of pre-funding

expenses and declining mail volume. With no visible signs of robust economic growth necessary to prop up mail volume and revenue, postal management saw an opportunity to slash jobs. In March 2010, the Service publicly unveiled an overall recovery plan that included legislative and operational changes, most notably a proposal eliminating Saturday mail delivery. The plan assumed dramatic and unrealistic mail



William H. Young installed Fredric V. Rolando as the 18th NALC president on July 2, 2009.



NALC members rallied with other postal workers nationwide on September 27, 2011, as part of an initiative called “Save America’s Postal Service.” The multi-union effort was designed to generate support for a legislative proposal that would help the USPS without degrading service. Pictured above are carriers in Lincoln, Nebraska.

volume decreases, a worsening mail-mix and, with delivery points increasing, enormous financial losses.

For Rolando, the Service’s plan contained the “good, the bad, and the ugly.” The new NALC president applauded the legislative proposals repealing the pre-funding mandate, developing new products and services, and employing flexible demand-based pricing. Unequivocally opposed to the Service’s veiled call to hire more low-wage, part-time workers and close small post offices, he was enraged by the Service’s intention to eliminate Saturday mail collections and delivery, a move he knew would lead to a “vicious cycle” of reduced service driving mailers away, thus increasing revenue short-falls requiring further cost-cutting measures. In fact, in May 2010, Postmaster General Jack Potter admitted his real goal was four-day delivery.

To save Saturday delivery, Rolando, his fellow officers and the NALC legislative staff, joined by thousands of letter carrier activists, lobbied Congress throughout 2010 and 2011 to guarantee the Fiscal Year 2011 budget would retain a “rider” requiring the USPS to maintain six-day delivery—a provision first adopted in 1983 and renewed every year afterward.

The union also intervened in the Service’s case before the Postal Regulatory Commission seeking approval for eliminating Saturday delivery, and argued in local and national media outlets for retaining Saturday delivery. In March 2011, the Commission, citing union evidence, concluded the USPS had overstated future savings from cutting Saturday delivery. The PRC’s opinion and NALC’S recruitment of small businesses to support Saturday delivery persuaded Congress to retain the six-day delivery mandate in the Fiscal Year 2011 budget.

Although buoyed by its success, NALC understood the Postal Service’s financial crisis required legislation to relieve the Service of its pre-funding burden and to grant it flexibility to develop and price fairly new products and services. This task was made all the more difficult by the election of an anti-government and anti-worker majority in the House of Representatives in the 2010 mid-terms elections. In April 2011, a bill was introduced in the House to dramatically reduce the impact of the pre-funding mandate, and in the fall, the union organized more than 500 rallies at the field offices of House members rallying support. Yet the legislation faltered as the anti-labor, pro-privatization House Oversight and Government Reform Committee moved ahead with a bill offering the Service no relief from the pre-funding requirement, eliminating Saturday delivery as well as door-to-door delivery to 40 million households and businesses, and the closing of thousands of post offices—a death sentence for the USPS.

Despite substantial opposition, H.R. 2309 was jammed through the committee on a party-line vote in October. Tossing fuel on the fire, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe in March 2012 endorsed “practically everything” in the bill, consistent with his announcement weeks earlier to eliminate overnight delivery of first-class mail by shutting

over half of the Service's mail processing plants. NALC immediately intervened before the Postal Regulatory Commission, arguing that cutting speed and quality of service would drive away business. Nonetheless, without waiting for the Commission's advisory opinion, the Service implemented its plan in May.

Spurred by the PMG's announcement to close plants, the Senate resuscitated S. 1789, a reform bill first drafted in 2011. NALC opposed the legislation when it came before the full Senate in the spring of 2012 because it provided insignificant relief to the Service from the mandate to pre-fund future retiree health benefits, permitted the elimination of Saturday delivery within two years if postal management decided it was necessary, and slashed workers' compensation benefits for postal employees. Despite NALC's opposition, which included national rallies at Senate field offices in all 50 states, the Senate passed S. 1789 in April 2012.

With the Senate having passed harmful legislation, and the more destructive House bill awaiting a vote of the full body, the union acted. In July, Rolando employed the union's rapid-fire e-Activist network to ask members to lobby their representatives to prevent H.R. 2309 from reaching the House floor. Almost simultaneously, the union president held a tele-town hall with thousands of letter carriers to discuss the crisis, which soon became more precarious. The postmaster general announced on August 1 that the Service would not make its \$5.6 billion fiscal year pre-funding payment for future retiree health benefits due September 30—a "default," congressional critics and an uninformed media corps claimed. In response, Rolando, joined by other resident officers, national business agents and branch presidents in key media markets, explained to the public that no other agency or company in America had to pre-fund future retiree health benefits, the payment

comprising the bulk of the Service's losses for that fiscal year. Nonetheless, the Service's failure to make the September 30 payment ignited another barrage of negative media stories and calls to end Saturday delivery.

BARGAINING UNDER DURESS

For the NALC, savoring its success in negotiating the 2006-2011 contract was short-lived. Due to the economic recession and the pre-funding mandate in the 2006 reform legislation, the Postal Service's financial condition deteriorated rapidly in 2008 and 2009. Fortunately, the 2006 contract's sub-contracting provisions provided a bulwark against outsourcing good city delivery jobs, but these provisions required implementation and monitoring.

Under the 2006 National Agreement, the parties established a six-month moratorium on new Contract Delivery Service contracts while a committee would develop a long-term understanding of the issues. The moratorium was extended twice, and in October 2008, the union and the Postal Service banned new CDS routes for the remainder of the five-year contract, thus guaranteeing that, for the first time in more than 30 years, the majority of new deliveries would be delivered by city carriers. The October agreement also set rules for assigning new deliveries in offices where city carriers worked alongside rural letter carriers and individuals delivering highway contract routes. By the spring of 2010, NALC's share of all delivery work, which had

Even as NALC was working to guide legislative solutions for its fiscal crisis, the union entered contract negotiations with the Postal Service on August 18, 2011.



NALC MEMBERSHIP

1889-2014

The numbers below shed light on one important aspect of the history of the NALC—the union’s growth and contraction.

No official record gives the exact number of branches in 1895, but in the early years of the union, branches were numbered sequentially, and Norristown, PA Branch 542 was founded on May 27, 1895, with additional branches chartered during the rest of the year. The number of branches grew over the next several decades as population centers sprung up throughout the country—especially in the years after World War II. But in 1970, convention delegates, recognizing that collective bargaining required larger branches with the resources to better represent the membership, amended the NALC Constitution to allow branches to merge. Ever since, the number of branches has declined sharply.

The uneven growth in the number of NALC members requires more explanation. The 60-members figure in 1889 reflects the number of delegates attending the union’s Milwaukee, Wisconsin organizing meeting. Almost immediately, the organization

increased its membership significantly, as local letter carrier groups formed into branches aligned with the new national union. The growth in membership increased irregularly for several decades in reaction to changing economic conditions affecting rates of household formation and mail volume and thus the number of city carriers on the USPS rolls. Membership increased dramatically in 1960 when the NALC Health Benefit Plan became part of the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program, and tens of thousands of letter carriers joined the union to take advantage of the Plan. An upsurge in mail volume in the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by a parallel increase in union membership, peaking in the late 1990s. But as mail volume plummeted during the early 21st century, the union’s membership also declined. The surge of city carrier assistants into the craft beginning in the spring of 2013 suggests the possibility of a leveling-off in the union’s membership, and even a possibility of growth in future years. Ultimately, however, mail volume trends and the fate of Saturday delivery and door-to-door delivery will largely determine the number of NALC members.

| Year | Members | Number of Branches |
|------|---------|--------------------|
| 1889 | 60 | — |
| 1895 | 8,000 | 541 |
| 1900 | 14,000 | 760 |
| 1905 | 17,000 | 1,056 |
| 1910 | 27,000 | 1,385 |
| 1915 | 32,000 | 1,694 |
| 1920 | 35,000 | 1,876 |
| 1925 | 49,000 | 2,400 |
| 1930 | 58,000 | 3,483 |
| 1935 | 59,000 | 3,084 |
| 1940 | 67,000 | 3,784 |
| 1945 | 68,000 | 3,871 |
| 1950 | 103,000 | 4,234 |
| 1955 | 104,000 | 4,610 |
| 1960 | 115,000 | 5,532 |
| 1965 | 174,000 | 6,312 |
| 1970 | 212,000 | 6,605 |
| 1975 | 232,000 | 5,379 |
| 1980 | 235,000 | 4,656 |
| 1985 | 279,000 | 3,933 |
| 1990 | 312,000 | 3,554 |
| 1995 | 314,000 | 3,141 |
| 2000 | 313,000 | 2,803 |
| 2005 | 301,000 | 2,500 |
| 2010 | 280,000 | 2,232 |
| 2014 | 271,000 | 2,047 |

declined from 85 percent in the 1970s to 70 percent in 2005, had stabilized.

Nonetheless, the sharp decline in mail volume in 2008 and 2009, coupled with the financial burden of the pre-funding requirement had led to a shedding of carrier jobs despite population growth adding delivery points. With letter carriers under increasing stress, evaluating and adjusting their routes fairly was crucial. A provision in the new contract had established a joint route evaluation task force, which by the time of the union’s 2008 convention in Boston was fully operational and ready to begin testing the union’s and the Postal Service’s alternatives. As a result, three alternate route adjustment programs were implemented over the next three years, all intended to ensure fair route adjustments and reduce stress and conflict.

Common to all three programs was an effort to adjust routes as nearly as possible to eight hours based on the regular letter carrier’s actual average office and street times over a period of time. Declining mail volume led NALC and USPS to use data from May and September 2008, and about 90,000 routes were adjusted. Beginning in April 2009, a second process with slight modifications was used to adjust some 150,000 routes. In May 2010, the union and the Postal Service established the Joint Alternate Route Adjustment Process that, like its predecessors, gave carriers a role in the evaluation and adjustment process and also provided that no adjustment be made without the consent of both local parties. A subsequent version of JARAP improved training and placed more authority at the local level. Together, these joint processes saved the USPS billions of dollars by adjusting routes substantially faster than had been the case.

Unfortunately, management reverted to its adversarial stance when, in August 2011, just days before talks were to begin for a new contract, USPS called upon Congress to eliminate the no-layoff provisions in union contracts to facilitate massive downsizing, and also to permit the Postal Service to unilaterally replace federal pension and health benefit programs with the Service's own programs. President Rolando and his negotiating team responded at the bargaining table that, although the NALC was open to cost-saving innovations, the union would fight to preserve wages and benefits achieved over decades. NALC also made it clear it would accept no contract that did not preserve COLAs and the subcontracting restrictions won in the 2006 contract.

All through the fall, the parties explored the complex issues inherent in establishing a postal-only health plan. They also discussed USPS proposals to significantly increase the size of the non-career workforce, following a pattern set in the APWU contract. NALC resisted the Service's demands while also insisting that non-career carriers have a path to career jobs. As the November 20 expiration of the existing contract neared, postal management cut off the talks and pulled out of the Joint Alternate Route Adjustment Process, then 18 months old, thus eroding the gains in mutual cooperation and cost savings that had been achieved. Although the contract was extended three times, when the parties failed to reach an agreement by January 20, 2012, the USPS declined to continue bargaining, triggering in mid-February a 60-day mediation period. With management refusing to accept NALC's demands on subcontracting and a career path for non-career letter carriers, mediation failed, and by early April the parties began to prepare for interest arbitration.

With Shyam Das, a highly respected and experienced arbitrator, as chair, joined by arbitrators representing the USPS and the NALC, the three-person

arbitration panel heard the parties opening statements in early September. During the following months, both the NALC and the USPS submitted written testimony from key officials as well as outside expert witnesses, and the arbitrators conferred frequently. In January 2013, the panel issued its final and binding award for a four-and-a-half year contract. In addition to providing for general wage increases and maintaining cost-of-living adjustments, the panel preserved the no-layoff clause and extended the subcontracting ban in the 2006 contract, while adding a provision ensuring that new delivery work arising from the development of new services on city carrier routes would be assigned to city carriers. The arbitrators also reduced the starting wages for new career letter carriers while maintaining the career letter carrier top-step pay and maintaining the 12.4 years necessary to reach the top step, and reduced the Service's share of the health care premium over a five-year period. The panel's most significant decision was to replace non-career transitional employees with a new and larger category of non-career letter carriers—city carrier Assistants. In creating the new position, the arbitrators also accepted the union's proposals to create an all full-time career workforce by phasing out part-time flexible carriers and giving CCAs the opportunity to fill available full-time career positions, an option transitional employees never had.

By extending the restrictions on subcontracting and ensuring that city carriers would be delivering new products and services on their routes, the union had succeeded in preserving letter carrier jobs. Although the Das board followed the APWU pattern and ordered the creation of city carrier assistants and lower steps for career carriers, the job of a letter carrier remained a good job with good pay and benefits. If the early years of CCA employment would not be as remunerative as they had been for career letter carriers in the immediate past, the new



contract provided a pathway to career wages and benefits. With the American economy staggering and the USPS itself recording massive losses, the panel had nevertheless thrown a lifeline to tens of thousands of future letter carriers, even if the lifeline was longer than both the city carrier assistants and the union would have preferred.

City carrier assistants began to enter the workforce in March 2013, and by late June 2013, the CCA workforce numbered over 27,000, leading the union to demand mechanisms for converting CCAs to career status as required by the arbitration award. Key was an August 30, 2013, memorandum that established specific steps and a timeline for filling vacancies, including the conversion of CCAs to full-time career status.

By mid-2014, thousands of city carrier assistants had been converted to career positions and acquired the entire slate of benefits provided career letter carriers, including sick and annual leave, health benefits, group life insurance, and participation in the Federal Employees Retirement System. That CCAs were entering the workforce in droves was a mixed blessing for the union. For the first time in years, the Postal Service was hiring new carriers, thus lessening the pressure on career letter carriers. In addition, CCAs' lower wage helped the Service's bottom line. On the other hand, as had been the case with transitional employees, NALC faced the difficult challenge of organizing city carrier assistants, a growing non-career segment of its bargaining unit. In response, the union tailored an organizing campaign specifically for CCAs that led to an influx of new members into many of the NALC's struggling branches. Despite this success, President Rolando and his fellow national officers understood that if Congress eliminated Saturday delivery, degrading the USPS'

delivery network, the union's total active membership, career and CCA, would plummet dramatically.

SAVING SATURDAY DELIVERY

Although efforts to eliminate Saturday delivery had faltered when the 112th Congress adjourned in early January 2013 without the House considering the slash-and-burn legislation passed in committee, postal management picked up the cudgels. In early February, Postmaster General Donahoe announced that the Postal Service would unilaterally end Saturday delivery by August, despite the congressional mandate requiring six-day delivery. Six weeks later, Rolando rallied thousands of NALC activists and their families in all 50 states to protest. Two days later, Congress adopted, and President Barack Obama signed, a continuing resolution keeping the government open through the end of the fiscal year and also mandating six-day delivery, necessary even though the Government Accountability Office had issued a legal opinion that USPS had no legal authority to reduce delivery unilaterally. The GAO opinion, plus the mandate in the continuing resolution, forced the Board of Governors to announce in April it would "follow the law."

With the Postal Service stymied, congressional efforts to end Saturday delivery resumed. In July, the chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee introduced a new bill, H.R. 2748, calling for an immediate end to Saturday delivery and to front-door delivery for 35 million Americans and for allowing non-federal employees access to the mailbox. The NALC responded that even though the bill contained positive provisions on price flexibility, it failed to adequately address the pre-funding requirement, and its delivery provisions would have a devastating impact on the mailing industry and



THE CHANGING FACE OF THE NALC



ALL ACTIVE LETTER CARRIER MEMBERS 1987 AND 2013

Numbers are percentages unless otherwise noted.

| | 1987 | 2013* |
|---------------------|------|-------|
| Male | 82.6 | 70.7 |
| Female | 17.4 | 29.3 |
| White | 74.1 | 56.1 |
| Black | 15.5 | 21.2 |
| Hispanic | 7.1 | 12.4 |
| Asian | 2.6 | 9.0 |
| Others | 0.7 | 1.3 |
| White Males | 62.2 | 41.3 |
| Veterans | 49.2 | 19.5 |
| Avg. Age (years) | 40.0 | 48.2 |
| Avg. Tenure (years) | 11.0 | 16.8 |

*2013 data includes both career and non-career carriers

A quick look at the photographs in the first several chapters of this history makes it abundantly clear that, for many years, the city carrier workforce consisted mainly of white males. But the pictures in the last few chapters tell a different story, with a growing percentage of minorities and women carrying the mail at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st. All signs point to an even more diverse workforce, and thus NALC membership, in the years ahead.

The top table at right tells the tale: A far greater proportion of the active membership in 2013 consisted of women and minorities than in 1987. As a result, white males comprised only 41.3 percent of active letter carrier members in 2013, compared with 62.2 percent in 1987.

In 2013, as compared with 1987, the active membership was also far older on average, had carried mail far longer, and had a far smaller percentage of military vet-

erans, even though the United States had fought two wars since September 11, 2001.

A closer look at the 2013 active carrier membership of the NALC suggests even more diversity is likely in the years ahead.

The second table compares the racial, gender and age characteristics in July 2013 of non-career letter carrier members (almost all city carrier assistants) with both career letter carriers and those with 25 years or more of service. To a great extent, carriers with 25 years of service or more in 2013 resembled the entire active carrier membership of 1987, while the entire 2013 career letter carrier membership was more diverse. The most significant difference, however, was between career carriers and non-career carriers. Since an even larger percentage of the active membership in future years will consist of minorities and women, a more diverse leadership will be necessary to maintain union solidarity and commitment.

ACTIVE LETTER CARRIER MEMBERS BY CAREER STATUS AND TENURE JULY 2013

Numbers are percentages unless otherwise noted.

| | Non-Career | All Career | 25 Years + Only |
|---------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| Male | 61.9 | 71.8 | 77.4 |
| Female | 38.1 | 28.2 | 22.6 |
| White | 42.9 | 57.7 | 69.0 |
| Black | 34.9 | 19.5 | 15.2 |
| Hispanic | 14.8 | 12.2 | 10.0 |
| Asian | 5.2 | 9.5 | 4.9 |
| Others | 2.2 | 1.1 | 0.9 |
| White Males | 29.2 | 42.8 | 54.3 |
| Veterans | 10.3 | 20.6 | 21.5 |
| Avg. Age (years) | 34.5 | 49.9 | 56.1 |
| Avg. Tenure (years) | — | 18.9 | 28.9 |



NALC has honed its grassroots legislative program to push Congress to maintain Saturday delivery service, as it did during its nationwide rallies on March 24, 2013.

American households and prevent the Service from taking advantage of the growing e-commerce market. Nonetheless, the committee passed HR 2748 on a party-line vote.

A proposed Senate bill introduced on August 1 was also designed to destroy the Service, if perhaps more slowly. S. 1486 provided for a three-year moratorium on the pre-funding requirement paid for by major downsizing and worker benefit cuts, and would eliminate Saturday delivery after a year while granting the postmaster general the authority to eliminate future days. It also mandated drastic reductions in door-to-delivery for millions of households and businesses, and a discriminatory change to compensation for injured federal workers. Almost immediately, NALC denounced the legislation, and in late September, Rolando testified before the Senate, criticizing the bill for failing to adequately address the 2006 pre-funding mandate, for providing for the end of Saturday delivery and door-to-door delivery and for creating a two-tier workforce.

While Congress dithered, the USPS released figures in the summer of 2013 supporting NALC's position that the Service's financial problems were largely

a result of the pre-funding requirement and the economic recession that had started in 2007. For the third quarter of the fiscal year, USPS posted an operating surplus—with Internet-powered package delivery increasing significantly and with advertising mail holding its own even as first-class mail declined more slowly.

In late 2013, the union's fight to preserve the Postal Service increasingly became entangled with congressional budget politics, but thanks in part to pressure brought by NALC's grassroots network, a joint House-Senate budget plan for the remainder of FY 2014 that passed Congress in December did not call for the elimination of Saturday delivery.

Nonetheless, in early 2014, efforts to eliminate Saturday delivery, either immediately or within a few years, remained alive in the relevant committees in the House and Senate despite the Service's operating profit in first quarter of Fiscal Year 2014. In February, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee moved first, passing a revised S. 1486 that merely delayed some of the service cuts contained in the original bill introduced the previous summer.

By late spring of 2014, the future of the Postal Service—and reform legislation—was far from settled. The union's position was bolstered by the Service's improving financial picture, sparked by the growing package delivery business that compensated in part for the continued diversion of first-class mail due to digital alternatives. Yet the union was aware that as long as the Service was burdened by the unfair and unaffordable pre-funding mandate contained in the Postal Accountability and

Enhancement Act of 2006, and management remained obsessed with its "shrink to survive" strategy, the future of the Postal Service and the jobs of letter carriers were at risk.

President Rolando vowed before a Senate committee on September 26, 2013, that NALC could not support any legislation that didn't fix pre-funding.



EPILOGUE

Reading this history of the National Association of Letter Carriers can be a disorienting experience. The story line is constantly circling back, repeating itself, with essential elements resurfacing again and again. As the preceding pages have shown, this is a story of persistence and resilience, of brothers (and later sisters) constantly striving—the issues rarely changing, the struggles never ending.

Take, for example, management's never-ending attempts to squeeze more work out of carriers than humanly possible—from Frederick Taylor's scientific management techniques of the 1910s, to the Letter Carrier Route Evaluation System of the mid-1970s, to the Delivery Operations Information System of the 21st century. Measure, count, time. From stopwatches to computers, it's been the same: deliver more mail to more homes and businesses faster, then tomorrow deliver even more mail to even more homes and businesses even faster.

But this union has never succumbed—always fighting to stop the stopwatches and rip up the computer-generated spreadsheets, always taking whatever action is necessary to keep carriers' work “fair, reasonable, and equitable.”

Again and again and again.

Of course, management has not been letter carriers' only adversary—on numerous occasions, the nation's political leaders joined the fray by trying to prevent carriers and their union from bringing their concerns to the attention of their elected representatives. The infamous Roosevelt and Taft “gag orders” in the first decade of the 20th century, rescinded in 1912, as well as the 1939 Hatch Act, finally repealed in 1993, told letter carriers in unmistakable terms that they were second-class citizens, American enough to shoulder a satchel, even fight a war, but not American enough to participate fully in the nation's democracy.

Ever since the strike of 1970, the battle for decent wages, benefits and working conditions has moved to the negotiating table. Over time, the NALC has successfully resisted most of postal management's knee-jerk proposals for reduced wages and benefits, two-tier workforces, and more onerous working conditions, while demanding, often successfully, major improvements in the wages, benefits and working conditions.

Again and again and again.

But the history of the National Association of Letter Carriers has not only been a story of the struggle to improve the working lives of letter carriers. It is also the story of men—and later, women—committed to serving the American people and ensuring that the United States Postal Service continues to fulfill its legal mandate to “provide prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas and...postal services to all communities.”

Take a look at the NALC Constitution, Article 1, Section 5, stating that one of the union's objectives is “to strive for the constant improvement of the Service.” It's not clear how far back those exact words go, but the idea has been around since the union's founding. In fact, Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution adopted in Milwaukee in August 1889 sets forth as an “object of the association...the advancement of the free delivery system.”

Ever since, this union and its members have believed that the job of a letter carrier is more than a job, but rather a mission, and that the Postal Service—even if sometimes an abusive and regressive employer—provides an essential service for the nation and its citizens.

Of course, depending upon when you're reading these words, whether the Postal Service will continue to provide the universal, quality service Americans deserve may be far from settled. Letter carriers and other postal employees may still be struggling with postal management and

Congress to ensure that the nation's postal system survives and prospers and that our postal networks, expanded over well more than two centuries, remain strong. If so, they will certainly be fighting to ensure that letter carriers are delivering to every home and business at least six days a week.

But maybe you'll be reading this after many of the disputes recorded in the last chapter of this history have been resolved—maybe in 2016 or 2020, maybe much later. Perhaps Congress and postal management will have finally understood that the Service could not “shrink to survive,” and that only by maintaining six-day delivery and, in some cases, even seven-day delivery, could the Service exploit the Internet-driven demand for package delivery and, as a result, not only survive but prosper. Perhaps those in Congress who will have fashioned this viable Postal Service will also have removed the unnecessary and costly burden of requiring the Service to pre-fund the health benefits of retirees not even on the rolls.

But if this optimistic scenario is to become reality, the Postal Service will likely have broadened its mandate to meet the changing demands of Americans in a digital age. As a result, the job of a letter carrier could very well be much different than it was in, say, 2014.

For one thing, by that time—whenever that may be—letter carriers will not be carrying very much first-class mail. Instead “letter carriers” may be mainly “parcel carriers,” with a smaller portion of their total deliveries consisting of “letter mail”—mostly advertising mail. The rest will probably be magazines, large-format advertising, and, of course, parcels. Lots of parcels, since parcel delivery will be an integral and integrated part of an expanding e-commerce sector of the economy. “Office time” could be slightly more than a “New York

minute.” And the battles with Congress over the continuation of six-day delivery may seem quaint, as future carriers are out on the streets every day of the week—sometimes picking up packages early in the day and delivering them across town a few hours later. Express mail on steroids.

But delivering letters, flats and packages may be just a part of what carriers do. They also will be the Postal Service's lead sales force—selling services, arranging pick-up and delivery times, even suggesting software innovations to help small businesses determine their shipping needs.

Carriers might also perform other services while completing their rounds—perhaps helping low-income customers connect online to a new USPS financial services system; or reading utility bills; or serving as mobile facilitators of government services, with keypad and Internet connection at the ready. In addition, these brothers and sisters of the National Association of Letter Carriers will be serving as a welcome and visible presence on the streets of America at a time when, with the decline of brick-and-mortar commercial establishments, the notion of “community” may have been radically altered.

Whatever the contours of a future (if not futuristic) Postal Service—whatever its size and products and services and regardless of how many letter carriers are fulfilling the needs of their customers—the men and women who will comprise the membership of the National Association of Letter Carriers in the years—even decades—ahead will continue to stand together, shoulder to shoulder. They will recognize—as they always have—that alone they are powerless, but together they are invincible. That is why letter carriers and their union will long remain, as they have been since 1889, carriers in a common cause.