

# Postal unions battling two-front war vs. service cuts, GOP threat to bargaining

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — The nation's postal unions, led by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) and the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), are fighting a two-front war.

One front is very public: against U.S. Postal Service (USPS) schemes for service cuts and post office closings. The other, which has just gotten started, is a variation of the GOP's nationwide war on workers. An influential Republican congressman wants to kill the collective bargaining rights of the USPS workers, just as some Republican governors did to their state and local government employees.

The longer-running and higher-profile fight is against the Postal Service's plans to cut costs by eliminating Saturday delivery, closing hundreds of local post offices and other facilities, and offering buyouts to veteran union workers so it can replace them with part-timers and temps.

USPS says it needs to make those moves to close an annual \$8 billion budget deficit caused, it says, by declining mail volume due to competition from the Internet and rising costs elsewhere.

The Letter Carriers in particular re-

tort that \$5.5 billion of the Postal Service deficit is due to a mandate in a 2006 postal "reform" law pushed through the GOP-run Congress by then-President George W. Bush that requires USPS to fully pre-fund future retiree health benefits. (It even covers retiree health benefits of yet-to-be-hired workers.) The cost to the agency is \$5.5 billion a year.

No other entity, public or private, must do that.

At the same time, USPS has overpaid into its pension fund between \$50 billion and \$75 billion. The unions are supporting a bill — HR 1351 — that would allow USPS to use its pension surpluses to cover its pre-funding costs. The bill has over 150 co-sponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives.

However, some opponents of the bill call it a taxpayer bailout.

"That's not true," says Jim Cook, president of Portland-based NALC Branch 82. "No tax dollars have been used to run the postal service since 1982."

Opponents in the House have introduced a bill of their own.

Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), a former car alarm baron who now chairs the House committee that writes Postal Service bills, wants to eliminate collective bargaining rights for all postal workers.

APWU posted an analysis of the bill on its website. It says the legislation closely follows the strategy of Republican governors nationwide who are using budget problems to attack collective bargaining rights.

Specifically, Issa wants to create a Solvency Authority similar to one created by the Republican-run Michigan Legislature, which allows the state to put "financially failing" local governmental bodies — from school boards to city and county councils — under state-run receivership. The receiver is a virtual dictator.

The first two "failing governments" put under such receivership were the Detroit public schools and the city of Benton Harbor. The Detroit receiver ultimately fired thousands of teachers and the Benton Harbor receiver nullified union contracts.

According to the Center for American Progress (CAP), a liberal think tank, giving power to a Solvency Authority to run the USPS — would "effectively end any real ability for workers to bargain collectively." Issa's bill says the Solvency Authority would "meet and confer" about its plans with the postal workers' unions, but could then impose whatever it likes.

CAP says Issa's bill tracks Michigan's law word for word and that the authority can "reject, modify, or terminate one or more terms or conditions of an existing collective bargaining agreement."

"This strategy ignores alternative methods of closing budget shortfalls and instead insists that public employee pay is the cause of budget gaps and that collective bargaining must go," CAP said.

NALC is currently preparing for negotiations with USPS this fall.

## IN MEMORIAM

**RUSSELL WAGNER**, a retired leader of Portland Elevator Constructors Local 23, passed away June 23. He was 86.



Wagner served as the financial secretary and business representative of Local 23 from 1970 to Feb. 1, 1986, when he retired. Prior to that, he worked 18 years for Otis Elevator Company.

**RUSSELL WALTER WAGNER** was born on Sept. 16, 1924, in South Bend, Washington. He played baseball and basketball at South Bend High School. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps in August 1943, serving in England and Germany as an engine mechanic on P47 airplanes.

He began his career in the elevator industry in 1950, working as a helper at Otis Elevator Company. He joined Local 23 and worked his way to a mechanic and installer for Otis.

Wagner met Dolores Hendryx of Portland, and they were married on May 3, 1950. The couple raised three boys in the house he built in Portland in 1950-51. She preceded him in death in March 1997.

Wagner was active in Local 23, serving on the union's Executive Board and later holding the offices of vice president and president before being elected financial secretary and business representative in 1970.

Wagner was on the board of directors of the Union Labor Retirement Association, which provides supervision for the Union Manors (Kirkland I, II, III, Marshall, Westmoreland in Portland and Kirkland Union Plaza in Vancouver). He had served in that post for more than 25 years.

Wagner spent 14 years on the governor-appointed Oregon State Elevator Safety Board and was vice president of the Columbia-Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council for many years.

He was inducted into the Northwest Oregon Labor Retiree Association's Labor Hall of Fame in April 2005.

Wagner is survived by his sons, Steve, Randy, and Terry; their spouses; eight grandchildren; and 15

great-grandchildren.

Steve and Randy work at Otis Elevator and are members of Local 23.

A service with military honors was held July 8 at Willamette National Cemetery.

The family requests in lieu of flowers donations go to the ALS Association and the American Cancer Society.

**PETE PARSONS**, a former business manager and executive secretary-treasurer of Painters District Council 55 (now District Council 5), died June 30 at age 74.



**PETER DESMOND PARSONS** was born on June 7, 1937, in Brighton, Sussex, England. After serving in the British Army, he completed a painting apprenticeship program.

He is a graduate of the Brighton College of Arts and Crafts in the United Kingdom.

In 1963, Parsons and his first wife, Una, and their three children migrated to the United States, settling in Beaverton. They had three more children before divorcing.

Shortly after landing in the U.S., Parsons joined Painters Local 10 and began working as a painter. He was active in the union and in its apprenticeship program, serving as an instructor for apprentices and also of skills-upgrading classes for journeymen. He chaired the Painters Oregon State Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee.

He was elected as a business agent of Local 10 in 1972 and later became a representative of Painters District Council 55. In 1978 he was elected the Council's business manager and executive secretary-treasurer.

Health issues in 1982 forced him to resign his post. After his health improved, he went back to work at the trade until retiring in 1999.

Parsons was inducted into the Labor Hall of Fame in December 2005.

Parsons is survived by his second wife, Bonita Rueppell, whom he married in 1975; five daughters; four sons; and more than 32 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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