

Rally to save postal service celebrates Postal Heritage Day

Postal workers, retirees, and community allies turned out Sunday, July 26, to celebrate the 240th anniversary of the U.S. Post Office.

In Portland, they marched through the Main Post Office downtown, chanted, ate birthday cake, and listened to postal defenders—including Benjamin Franklin, the first postmaster general in 1775.

“The postal service is under assault,” proclaimed Franklin (aka Ben Poe). “Over 100,000 good union jobs have been lost in the past 10 years as post offices and mail processing plants have been cut and closed. Mail is being delayed. Six day delivery and at-the-door delivery are on the chopping block.”

Franklin said the postal service is not broke, and that the agenda of the 1% and their friends in Congress is to cripple the institution to soften it up for union busting and privatization.

“The USPS is a \$67 billion annual business with over \$100 billion surplus in its pension and retiree health benefit funds, over 30,000 post offices and 200,000 vehicles,” he said. “We’re facing a huge transfer of public wealth to Wall Street investors.”

The Postal Service was established by the Second Continental Congress in 1775, making it one year older than the United States.

“For more than two centuries it has been the government agency that interacts the most with the American people,” said David Yao, vice president of the Greater Seattle Area Local of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), at a Postal Heritage Day rally at Seahurst Park in Burien, Washington.

“U.S. post offices are anchors of our communities all across the country, and postal workers are the public servants Americans encounter on a daily basis,” Yao said. “Our public postal service must be protected as a public service, a public asset, and a national treasure.”

Recent small victories in the struggle to save the postal service have included a one year moratorium on mail plant closures and a National Labor Relations Board charge against the USPS to stop outsourcing postal retail jobs to Staples Office Supply stores.

Postal unions—APWU, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, the National Association of Letter Carriers and the National Association of Rural Letter Carriers—have called on President Obama to declare July 26 Postal Heritage Day.



Ben Franklin (aka Ben Poe) joined nearly 50 people at the Main Post Office in downtown Portland July 26 to celebrate the 240th anniversary of the U.S. Post Office. Postal unions have written to President Obama, asking that the occasion be celebrated every year as Postal Heritage Day.

RETURN TO SENDER:

NLRB says Postal Service deal with Staples broke federal law

American Postal Workers Union (APWU) has won Round One of a legal fight against outsourcing to Staples.

In a complaint issued June 26, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) says the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) broke federal labor law when it set up postal sales counters at Staples stores—staffed by low-wage nonunion Staples employees. The NLRB seeks a court order requiring USPS to restore the work to APWU members. Staples sales employees earn about one-third the roughly \$25-an-hour wage of APWU members.

At USPS—unlike other federal agencies—labor relations are under the NLRB’s jurisdiction. Except for the right to strike, most private-sector union

“The Staples deal degrades postal work. It reduces postal retail service to a ‘product’ that low-wage employees sell, rather than a public service performed by highly-trained professionals.”

— APWU President
Mark Dimondstein

rights apply to postal employees too, including the right to bargain over changes to terms and conditions of employment. USPS violated that requirement

when it set up postal counters at the big-box office supply seller Staples without informing the union or negotiating, the NLRB complaint says. The move also violated a provision of the union contract that covers outsourcing.

USPS is expanding its outsourced retail shipping “partnerships” at the same time it’s closing post offices and processing facilities.

The Staples deal started in fall 2013 with a pilot program to set up mini-post offices in more than 80 stores. That provoked a furious reaction from the 200,000-member APWU and other postal unions. APWU organized protests outside Staples stores, demanding that postal counters be staffed by postal employees. In April 2014, the

union announced a boycott of Staples stores and the company’s Quill.com website. The AFL-CIO endorsed the boycott, and so did AFSCME, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and Service Employees International Union. The decision by the two teachers unions to join the boycott got Staples’ attention, and in July 2014, Staples announced it was ending the pilot program. But APWU said that was a ruse—USPS cancelled Staples’ mini-post-office pilot program and reclassified it as part of its Approved Shipper program, in which Staples also sells shipping via UPS. The reclassified program was then expanded to all of Staples’ more than 1,000 stores.

The boycott continues.

The NLRB complaint next goes to a federal administrative law judge, who will hear the case Aug. 17, in Washington, D.C.

