



NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION

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2011 Contract Update #7

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IN-DEPTH CONTRACT DISCUSSIONS BY BARGAINING SUBCOMMITTEES

Bargaining for the 2011 National Agreement continues to chug along at a steady pace. Progress has been made on a variety of fronts, but there is still an enormous amount of work facing both parties. The parties adopted a November 4, 2011 deadline for the submission of non-economic, work-rule proposals, so the parties have now put forward their full panoply of proposals to debate and discuss.

Over the past few weeks, there have been ongoing meetings of several subcommittees. The focus of one subcommittee has been on Article 12 of the National Agreement. This should come as no surprise, given that the Postal Service has announced plans to study more than 250 mail processing facilities for possible closings and/or consolidations. A plan of such magnitude could have drastic implications for mail handlers across the country, related primarily to seniority and reassignments that, for the most part, are governed by Article 12. The NPMHU strongly believes that it is best to address these implications now, in an effort to mitigate any potential hardships for mail handlers that may arise as a result of these plans.

With this in mind, the bargaining team has put forth a large number of Article 12 proposals to improve the process of how seniority is calculated for those who voluntarily or involuntarily relocate to a new facility. The team also is looking to increase the bidding and reassignment options that may be available to mail handlers who may be adversely affected by any closings or consolidations.

The Postal Service, on the other hand, has been reluctant to consider any proposal that it believes will increase costs, add administrative procedures, or hinder its flexibility. Indeed, it continues to reiterate that any final agreement must do just the opposite - reduce costs and increase flexibility. This position controls many of the proposals and responses put forth by the Postal Service.

Another subcommittee that continues to meet is concerned with Article 15, governing the grievance and arbitration process. The parties have exchanged information and proposals on a host of topics, most of which are aimed at streamlining and therefore accelerating the process for settling or deciding grievances. As everyone knows, justice delayed is often justice denied. In addition, justice delayed is often justice received in an inefficient or costly manner, so getting to more prompt final decisions is in everyone's best interest.

Other subcommittees have been discussing Articles 7 and 32, although most of these matters are tied up with, or directly related to, the main table discussions on economics. With the USPS twin objectives of increasing "affordability" and "flexibility," and the NPMHU goal of maintaining jobs, wages and benefits while identifying practical solutions to real problems, there are lots of discussions that touch upon the fundamental underpinnings of the parties' collective bargaining relationship.

While the subcommittees keep meeting, the parties also have been meeting in main table discussions. As expected, the Postal Service has submitted a variety of proposals, many of which are unpalatable to the NPMHU bargaining team. A major subject of discussion is health care, as the USPS already has publicly stated that it would prefer to exit from the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan and establish a USPS-only health plan.

The NPMHU remains opposed to draconian proposals that are aimed at gutting the pay and benefits of mail handlers, and will continue to search for alternative ways to help both the Postal Service and the NPMHU reach their common goals.

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