



COLLECTIVE BARGAINING HISTORY

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In this article, I wanted to explain how we got to the collective bargaining that we have today. The National Postal Mail Handlers Union was first formed in 1912. Most of the terms and conditions of employment that we have now were not just given to us. Prior to 1970, all improvements to wages and benefits were established by federal law and achieved mostly through lobbying. The right to bargain over wages, benefits and working conditions did not start until 1971 with the Postal Reorganization Act.

HERE IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF OUR HISTORY

1910s — We achieved the right to organize and to adjust grievances, an 8-hour workday, compensation for injury, and holiday compensation.

1920s — We improved compensation for injuries incurred on duty. We achieved a higher rate for overtime and night differential pay. Our job title at that time was Unskilled Laborer, which resulted in Clerks and Letter Carriers receiving a larger salary increases.

1930s — A 5-day work week established, gained retirement, sick leave, holiday benefits and a 44-hour work week.

1940s — Credit for military service toward retirement, higher wages won, time and half for overtime, paid jury duty. In 1944, our title changed from Laborer to Mail Handler. This enabled us to get a corresponding increases in salary with the Clerks and Carriers.

1950s — Sick leave accrual ceiling removed, liberalize retirement and survivor retirement benefits.

In 1963 - through Executive Order signed by John F. Kennedy, the Union obtained exclusive recognition to negotiate a number of working conditions directly with postal management.

In 1969 — Merged with the Laborers International Union of North America, (LiUNA)

1970 — The great postal strike of 1970 was caused by a combination of factors, including extremely low wages, poor working conditions, and the absence of collective bargaining. At that time, postal workers were not permitted by law to engage in collective bargaining. Postal workers felt wages were very low, benefits poor and working conditions unhealthy and unsafe. An immediate trigger for the

strike was a Congressional decision to raise the wages of postal workers by only 4%, while at the same time raising Congressional pay by 41%, and by the government's subsequent failure to act on promised wage hikes.

Workers grew increasingly frustrated with Congress, and on March 18, 1970, thousands of New York City postal workers walked off the job in protest. Within days, they were joined by 200,000 others in 30 major cities. Mail service ground to a halt, and the plight of postal workers was brought to the public's attention. The strike was soon settled after eight days, when it was agreed that upon the employees return to work, negotiations would be held between the Post Office Department and its then, seven recognized unions. Negotiations began on March 25, 1970, and, on April 2nd, the parties announced that

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they had agreed to pay increases. This resulted in Congress approving a 6 percent wage increase, retroactive to the previous December. The parties also agreed to jointly develop and support a comprehensive reform package.

President Nixon signed the **Postal Reorganization Act of 1970** on August 12, 1970, **which created the new U.S. Postal Service**, effective on July 1, 1971. This Act granted unions the right to negotiate with management over their wages, benefits and working conditions. In lieu of the right to strike, a binding arbitration process was established for resolving contract disputes. The law also granted postal workers an additional 8 percent raise and enabled them to advance more quickly to higher-paying positions.

1971 — The first negotiated agreement was completed for the period of July 21, 1971 – July 20, 1973.