

# MEETING THE MOMENT

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As negotiations for our next collectively bargained agreement grind on, it is as good a time as any to consider the impact and the importance of the work being done in our nation's capital and across the country by those dedicated representatives tasked with creating a contract that demands improvement in wages, benefits and working conditions — work done on behalf of tens of thousands of mail handlers across the nation. The discussion, brainstorming, and the inevitable debate while composing enhancements in contractual language or the creation of new language to address the previously unforeseen needs of mail handlers is a titanic undertaking. This work is often followed by the redrafting of those sometimes fought-over proposals, fine tuning the rationale behind the point and purpose of the Union's ask. All of this occurring before submission to the other side, is a process fraught with a host of concerns and potential missteps. The submission meetings are more often than not met with great reticence, intense suspicion, catatonic indecision, and sadly sometimes outright rejection; followed by additional and potentially multiple rounds of writing and then the rewriting of counter proposals and the tedium continues. The behind-the-scenes research supporting the basis for the Union's "ask" is, without a doubt, generally thankless toil, with the entire process an almost endless slog. Simply stating "we deserve this right or that benefit," will not frequently carry the day. As we all know, the process of negotiation is bilateral, with both sides advancing the interests of those they represent. This is the nature of the beast, but there is no doubt in this mind that the slog for what's in the best interests of mail handlers is righteous and

embraced with zeal by each and every representative of this great Union engaged in this, frequently, marathon struggle. The battle over single words or phrases in a sentence can last days or weeks with committees and sub-committees from both sides dueling over the "real" meaning of the proposal. It is not a journey for those without patience and perseverance. All involved on this side of right understand the importance of this round of bargaining and are reminded that belonging to an organization that enjoys the legal right to not only negotiate a National collective bargaining agreement as well as installation by installation agreements between its members and the employer, but also the right to defend those bargained for terms of employment wherever and whenever management violates the negotiated rules. We know and you should too, that this is well and truly a fortunate set of circumstances. Anxiety ridden, yes. Possibly disappointing for some, also true. But without question the clearest path to advancing the interests of the members of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. Each round of bargaining brings with it the opportunity to improve the lives of the working men and women of the Mail Handlers Union, and these opportunities cannot be wasted. I am certain we shall meet this moment and deliver for those we represent.

We should recognize that there are many in this country and elsewhere who do not enjoy the very basic right to have a say in the workplace. For example, within the last twelve months, many of our Brothers and Sisters in the Federal workforce have been stripped of this very basic human right by the current occupant of the White House. While there is legislation, HR 2550, that you can support as an advocate for





the Labor movement writ large and help restore these stolen rights to collectively bargain, unfortunately, much has already been lost to those in the federal sector. We never want to face such an arrangement and as we continue to battle for the equitable contract we have earned through previous sacrifice, we should all find solace in the fact that we can even enter the negotiating fray with management without interference.

While our national partners renew the negotiation for a new and improved contract, the primary focus of the Union at the Local level continues and is really not at all complicated. Protect those negotiated rights and challenge management every time they violate them. Punish the employer through the grievance arbitration process for those contractual transgressions and make those

who have been harmed whole. Sure, those dim and disgruntled representatives among the employer's ranks who are absolutely determined to break the rules for no good reason other than to fill their empty little lives, most times over and over again, is beyond frustrating. We are all angered each and every time we are mistreated by the self-assessed high and mighty in management. The good news is that while we are regularly subjected to petty managerial nonsense, we do have the power, all of us, to seize the opportunity, to meet

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the moment, to set the record straight and put them in their place. Now, I may be a lot of things, but I am not naïve, and I recognize that on too many occasions the management representatives of the United States Postal Service at the mail processing level are not held accountable for their, on some occasions, egregious crimes against the craft. But this fact should not discourage us from exercising our right to

challenge the violation of our legal and contractual rights. Across the country, Local Union representatives of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union embrace this core mission and push back on those who don't have the common decency to abide by the contract. But Brothers and Sisters there is much, much more at stake when

those in charge break the rules. When the employer violates the contract that they agreed to and breaks the promise of collective bargaining, they demean us as employees of the United States Postal Service and members of this great Union. They deny us the dignity and respect we have earned and we deserve. We urge you to never except these terms of employment. Push back and demand a Union Steward. This Union has always got your back, Brothers and Sisters.