

TENTATIVE AGREEMENT REACHED DESPITE INOPPORTUNE TIMES

Paul V. Hogrogian, National President



On January 22nd, the NPMHU announced that it had reached a tentative agreement with the U.S. Postal Service over the terms of the 2019 National Agreement. The announcement was made during a conference call through which Regional and Local Union representatives were briefed on the terms of the negotiated settlement. The 2016 bargaining agreement expired on September 20, 2019. Although no final agreement was reached before that deadline, the parties agreed to extend their negotiations past the deadline in order to give their bargaining representatives additional time to reach a comprehensive settlement agreement. During this extended negotiation period, the parties were ultimately successful in reaching a negotiated settlement.

Our priorities entering bargaining included:

1. A fair and just general wage increase
2. A continuation of our current Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)
3. Keep the No Lay Off clause
4. Improve the wages, rights and benefits for our MHAs
5. Increased MHA conversions to career status
6. Return subcontracted work to the Mail Handler Craft and stop future subcontracting
7. Minimize the dislocation and inconvenience to Mail Handlers subject to involuntary reassignments
8. Fight any USPS proposals to implement any new lower wage scale and reduced benefits for future career employees
9. Address the issue of MHAs serving as 204Bs
10. Achieving an MOU on Sexual Harassment and Discrimination in the USPS.

We believe that the tentative agreement addresses most, if not all, of our bargaining priorities. Throughout the negotiation process, the union submitted proposals to achieve these bargaining goals. This was not a particularly opportune time during which to bargain. The Postal Service's financial situation, the Postmaster General's 10-year plan, the political stalemate in Congress, the President's Task Force on the Postal Service, the OMB privatization recommendations, the continuing uncertainty about Postal Reform legislation, the anti-worker/anti-union climate in Washington, DC, and the Postmaster General's recent retirement announcement made these negotiations extremely difficult.

The 2019 National Agreement will cover a period of three years expiring at midnight on September 20, 2022. There will be four general wage increases totaling 3.9% during the three-year period covered by the contract. The NPMHU was successful in negotiating the continuation of the Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) in the tentative agreement. The contract calls for six COLAs during the term of the contract to be paid every March and September beginning in March of 2020. Although MHAs do not receive COLAs, they will receive annual wage increases that are 1% higher than career employees.

There are other significant improvements in the proposed contract, including the retention of the no-layoff MOU which guarantees that career mail handlers on the rolls as of September 20, 2019 will be protected from layoff. This is extremely important in light of the USPS' projections of continuing declines in revenue and mail volumes. The NPMHU was also successful in negotiating the elimination of the casual category in the Mail Handler craft.

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The tentative agreement also provides that all current MHAs (in 200-workyear facilities) with at least 30 months of service as of ratification will be converted to full-time career positions. MHAs will now receive overtime pay for work performed in excess of eight (8) hours on duty in a service day (or in excess of 40 hours in a service week), while career Mail Handlers who seek overtime will maintain their preferences for such work.

Under Article 2 of the National Agreement, a new MOU will be added about a Workforce Free of Harassment. The parties commit to providing employees with a safe, productive, and inclusive workplace, and establish a Task Force on Preventing Harassment that will be used to ensure that employees are fully aware of policies and procedures that exist to combat harassment. Special thanks are extended to the NPMHU Women's Committee for their work on this important MOU.

The tentative agreement also provides for improved health insurance options for MHAs including self plus one and family coverage. Following their first year, MHAs will be given the option of the USPS Noncareer Health Plan or using the same dollar contributions from the Postal Service (at \$125 per pay period for self only, or with USPS paying 75% of the total premium for self-plus-one or family coverage) towards the MHBP Consumer Option or MHBP Value Plan, which are two of the plans sponsored in the Federal Employees Health Benefits program by the NPMHU.

There are also several improvements to Article 12 which will minimize the dislocation and inconvenience to Mail Handlers subject to involuntary reassignments.

The NPMHU bargaining team was led by the National President and included National Secretary-Treasurer Michael Hora, Manager of Contract Administration Teresa Harmon, Executive Assistant to the National President Bobby Blum, National CAD Representatives Kevin Fletcher and Charles Manago and our legal team from the NPMHU's General Counsel's office. The National Executive Board was fully engaged in this process and was deeply involved in the bargaining decisions. I want to thank the members of the bargaining team and the National Executive Board for their hard work during these negotiations. I also want to thank all the Regional and Local Union representatives who provided us with information when we reached out to obtain research for some of the proposals and counter-proposals.

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contract which is worthy of ratification. We urge you to vote "yes" on the tentative agreement. If the tentative agreement is not ratified, the parties will adopt dispute resolution procedures that will include mediation and, if necessary, binding interest arbitration.

If we do enter Impasse Arbitration and if the APWU negotiations are any indication, we expect that the USPS will submit regressive and draconian economic proposals which may include:

- A wage freeze for current employees
- Lump sum payment(s) in lieu of raises and Cost of Living adjustments
- Increasing the non-career workforce
- Current employees with less than 6 years of service must work 15 years of service to achieve no lay off protection
- Elimination of no layoff clause for future employees
- Pay and benefits substantially cut for all future career hires, including MHAs who are converted to career.

Should we enter impasse arbitration, the NPMHU will continue to make all the arguments that we have to support our proposals, presenting experience and evidence from across the field in this round's discussions.

I remain confident that through the work of our Contract Administration Department and our legal representatives, and through the hard work of our Regional, Local, and Branch representatives, we can successfully meet any and all challenges that lie before us. But we must remain united in the face of the Postal Service's attacks on our jobs.

In these and other endeavors, the continuing support of all Mail Handlers is very much appreciated.

Fraternally,



Paul V. Hogrogian
National President

****This article reflects the status of the bargaining process as it existed at the time that this magazine went to press.*