



EVERY SINGLE DAY

BY JOHN GIBSON, EASTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

Now that we have completed the national collective bargaining process and a new and improved contract is to be implemented, it would be easy to think that the Union's work is complete, for the next several years at least, and we can now relax and begin the planning for the next round of negotiations. Well, I am here to tell you Brothers and Sisters that that suggestion couldn't possibly be further from the truth.

Yes, it is true that the negotiation of a national agreement is one of the most important jobs of this Union. Improvements in wages, benefits and working conditions, as we have often stated, are arguably the heart and soul of the Union's purpose. However, we would be ignoring the reality of the postal workplace and those tasked with managing the movement of the mail, if that was all there was to it. Negotiating our rights, in some respects, is the easy part (although our negotiating team might beg to differ), defending those new and already established rights is the where the real pick and shovel work begins.

Serving the NPMHU over multiple decades in many capacities beginning as an Alternate Shop Steward, to Regular

Steward, Chief Steward, Branch President, and now Local President, I can tell you that the back breaking work of this Union really occurs now, after we have signed a new contract. As anyone reading this already knows, the width and breadth of the untenable combination of the ignorance and arrogance of the employer, the sheer scope of obstinance and stupidity in the managerial ranks cannot be underestimated. The day-to-day challenges faced by mail handlers and those who represent those dedicated employees never ceases, and the battle to defend what is rightfully ours continues every single day.

As this new agreement — with its significant pay scale improvements as well as work rule advancements — is implemented, we will all experience some degree of a learning curve. However, the curve for those in management will be completely off the charts and immeasurable in any conventional way. The first and probably greatest obstacle our counterparts in management will face is their conviction that we really don't have any rights at all, and even if we do, they are granted only at their discretion. This is bullshit of course, but it is only our work as a

Union, representatives and members alike, that can wash this stench away. How is this accomplished?

Let's take a minute to discuss the matter of dues deduction, or more accurately, the return on the investment of the dues you pay every two weeks. The reality is simple: Without sufficient resources, there can be no representation. There will always be some who will quibble about the dues we pay and sometimes enter into an apoplectic fit when an increase in those dues occurs. The response is simple: the dedication and commitment of scores of representatives across this Union is not enough by itself to get the job done. For those not familiar with the constitutional process, bi-weekly dues go up a dollar each time either a negotiated contractual increase occurs or, in the absence of a wage increase, there is a cost-of-living adjustment increase of more than \$500 in a calendar year. Only a total of a one-dollar increase can occur annually under this provision. The question is what do we get for those dues, what is the return on that investment?

Let's examine the last seven years or so and do some simple math.

Negotiated wages for Level 4, first step, Full-Time Regular Mail Handlers



hired prior to February of 2013 increased by more than \$12,000 in that time. Over the same period union dues went up by \$208 annually. You received \$12,000 on an investment of \$208. That return on investment, by the way, never ends and is locked in until the day you retire. For those hired after February 2013, first step Level 4 wages increased by more than \$8,000. For your investment of \$208 a Level 4 top step mail handler gets \$14,000 and that never ends.

While your dues are justified by the steady increase in wages alone, your Union provides a lot more than a negotiated wage increase. For example, union dues make possible the filing of grievances at both the National and Local levels. These are the National and Local protections that are absolutely critical to maintaining the integrity of the National Agreement as well as your Local Memorandum of Understanding (which provides the important rules that govern your facility's overtime and leave rules). Without the enforcement mechanism of grievances through Article 15, management would be left to run ruthlessly rampant on the workroom floor. Hell, they already do their damndest to screw things up as it is. I shudder to think of the

postal workplace run by the depraved and the despicable in management without this Union. I regularly hear reports of Local Union success stories where class action grievances challenging employer violations have resulted in significant remedies being awarded. From cross craft violations to a failure to apply Article 8 and the overtime desired list, our union has won through the grievance process literally tens of millions of dollars which has been distributed to mail handlers throughout the country over the last seven years. For example, just recently within Local 308, \$1.4 million was awarded to members of the Trenton P&DC when the employer violated Article 7 by assigning clerks to do our work. While the tenacious work of the Branch President and the Stewards in that facility is to be celebrated, it is not unique and is by no means an aberration my friends. Violations of this sort occur on a regular basis and remedies are awarded to Locals nation-wide all due to the hard work of a Union that is supported by your dues. A common thread runs through this tale — a well-resourced and committed Union succeeds in defending the rights and economic interests of

its members. Those resources come from Union dues.

The Union does not just process grievances. There are other important elements to the services provided by both the National and your Local Union. Among other things, the Union provides training and assistance to the scores of representatives across the nation. They are the ones who stand up to management and who wield that pick and shovel every single day. Ensuring that those on the front lines have the requisite knowledge and resources to file grievances and to advocate complicated contractual arguments before an arbitrator in the most persuasive manner requires the resources generated by Union dues. The Union also provides relevant information to the membership of this great Union on a variety of platforms, including this very publication. This is absolutely essential to a well-rounded Labor Organization. Web sites, both Local and National, apps, direct mailings, meetings, all supported by Union dues and all necessary.

Sisters and Brothers this Union, Your Union, has your back every single day and we value your commitment to the movement, without it all would be lost.