

KILL THE RAT!!!!!! by magal

In 2002, both our Union and the Postal Service stood before arbitrators and firmly stated their positions. Our Union pled a case of unjust standards and work being required off the clock. The Postal Service pled a case of "too liberal time standards" both in regard to adding functions which we were asking for time and to increasing any previously negotiated standards. What the arbitrator failed to recognize was that we were already required to perform the functions and were only asking for a time standard to compensate us for that work.

The Postal Service presented witness after witness stating we were getting our fair share of the pie, and even implying we were happy up until this time with standards we had previously negotiated as we had proven by ratifying previous contracts; therefore, we should be happy now....

"Ward also pointed out to the panel that the rural carriers had ratified negotiated agreements in recent years by overwhelming margins, agreements that did not include the "catch up."

He cited the ratification of a negotiated agreement by 99.23% and then, almost MOCKINGLY, noted that a later ratification of a tentative agreement had squeaked by with only a 99.11% approval rating. The 99.11% reference was the ratification of the 1995-1999 National Agreement with only the State of Arizona voting against ratification. All of this was to show the arbitrator that apparently rural carriers have been happy with their lot."

Just as the Union has used past practice against management to successfully argue grievances, the Postal Service was arguing past practice [ratifications and negotiated contracts] against the uUnion to prove the happy state of mind the rural carriers always had and should continue to have. He failed to point out that the membership had never had a one member, one vote, and in fact, the Board had ratified the previous agreements, not the membership.

The proposals that were presented to the arbitration panel are the following:

- (1) Parcels = 1.5 minutes each,
- (2) Re-loading (replenishing) time = 5 minutes/day,
- (3) Unloading time = Actual time,
- (4) Edit book = 10 minutes/week for up to 10 entries, additional time for more than 10 entries, and
- (5) Case label maintenance = 10 minutes/week."

"Mr. Daigneault directed his attention to the reloading and unloading time proposals where he tried to show there was no need to add these functions to the already "liberal time standards."

Though we got none of our above proposals in the Wells award, the mindset of both parties has changed. Why? What has changed? Why would the Postal Service, who fought us so fiercely in 2002, be backing away from their arguments? Why would they be offering us an extension with new standards and not take anything away [on the surface]? How could this be a sound business decision on their part? Why has the Board majority accepted a lower standard than they fought for in 2002? Can National not look in the future and see the ramifications this will have on other negotiations, arbitrations, and time standards?

On the surface, many carriers have said the proposed extension appears good. But will you find the true intent of the Postal Service on the surface? Have you ever found it there before? Do you think for

one minute that the Postal Service does not have a plan in place to recapture the cost of what they offer us?

Do you not think they have a plan in place to recapture the future technology which is being either implemented or is in our immediate future nationwide, such as PARS? The only opportunities the Postal Service has to recapture cost of any of these advancements associated with rural carriers is during a mail count and during negotiations. And if that mail count is disparate, and in the Postal Service's favor, they can in fact recapture cost and beyond on the backs of the working rural carriers.

It is not coincidental that the mail counts proposed are set up with the last being only 2 weeks in duration. The Union has always requested 4 week mail counts, just as, at least, one 2 week mail count has always been either mandated by the Postal Service as a condition of a negotiated contract or by swaying an arbitrator to award it as a part of a contract. Granted, we had that same opportunity to sway the arbitrator, but we failed to do so....perhaps because the Postal Service spoke with a forked tongue. "Ms. Wilson said that the Postal Service proposals on mail count and time standards would "fix" the problem of the inappropriate bump. She testified that a two-week count is "as accurate and reliable as a four-week count." "There has been no change to the time standards, yet the carriers have been the beneficiaries of new equipment and improved work methods," she said. She stated that the current time standards are "too liberal" and that the "outdated standards must be adjusted." This has given rural carriers a windfall."

Historically, the only places rural carriers have lost have also been during mail counts and during negotiations. Does our Board majority not see this is our opportunity to change that and mandate 4 week counts? This challenge can be and should be the leverage we use during negotiations.

If we ratify this extension, the 2 week count will most likely be mandated by management as a National mail count. If so, every rural route will be counting for 2 weeks with no holiday included. This would occur immediately after the Postal rate changes are implemented. Have you forgotten rate hikes of the past, the rush of bulk mailers and even first class mail to be mailed prior to the change? Have you forgotten the lull immediately after a rate hike was implemented? In 2006, the lull will be during the proposed 2 week mail count. How is that for recapturing costs at the expense of the rural carriers? If you believe the count of 2002 was a rape count, 2006 will be a massacre.

Are we actually being expected to vote on something without seeing the details? They offer us 18 minutes per week for unloading and reloading without any definition of exactly what this will and or more specifically will not include. They provide us with vague language in a special edition magazine. And to add insult to injury, we are being assured by the Board that the Postal Service has promised they will write the wording to be very specific in what will and will not be included.

HELLO??? Can you hear me now?....The postal service promises?....God help us!

Will click and ship time standards, which are still under review, be the sacrificial lamb in receiving this 18 min? or will it be the pending step 4's on second trips? or will they go to the 603 and change the definition on parcels picked up weighing over 2 pounds so that the current time standard of 4 min for these parcels will be just out of reach of most carriers, much like they changed the definition on what qualified for a picked up certified letter just a couple years back? Or will it simply be clarified in a district memo come count time?

Many carriers have also stated this 18 min is something we have never had before, so we should take it and get more later. I ask, "Is 18 min enough?"

In 2002, the Union fought for 5 min reload time per day and actual time on unload. What has changed? This would be 30 min reload per week to every route, plus actual time. I will speculate that unload should at a minimum equal at least to the same amount of time as reloading. Using this speculation, it would equal another 30 min per week to every route, totaling one base hour.

What has changed since 2002 that the Board is willing to accept and offer to the membership 18 min for what we were asking for a minimum of 60 min? But more importantly, what has changed that the Postal Service is now willing to accept a standard they fought so hard? And without "taking anything from" us? What is the hidden agenda here? Where will they recapture this savings?

I would also speculate that accepting this time standard could have other ramifications we haven't even begun to think of, such as, would the Postal Service present to our next arbitrator that our load time should also be standardized? Would they offer some insignificant amount of time and call it liberal?

Would a future arbitrator find it ridiculous to have a time standard for unloading but not one for loading, thus imposing a standard on loading? And would it be a mere 18 min per week?

There are far too many individual elements and variances involved to accept a standardized time over actual time for unloading. Whether this is a fair standard or not, if accepted, the Postal Service will try to recapture the costs.

Some carriers have stated: take the 18 now and get more later. What kind of mentality is this? Is this the kind of advice you would give your child? Do less than you can today, and tomorrow you can make up for it? Or would you expect your child to do his/her best today on the premise there may not be an opportunity tomorrow?

When we have attempted to change any of these standards ... "He quoted the arbitrator in that arbitration as having said, "A deal is a deal." This quote and the related testimony was the last of many times that the Postal Service has told the neutral arbitrator, Mr. Wells, that he should not grant the rural carriers something that was negotiated in 1978 and something that the NRLCA has not been successful in achieving in negotiations since that time."

Also note, historically, regardless of whether a true reflection of the actual time is reflected or not, it has been rare that any time standard revisited has changed in our favor.

I offer you these excerpts from the hearings of the days of the Wells arbitration, although National states this tentative agreement has nothing to do with the Wells award, I contend it has a great deal to do with it. A "yes" vote from the membership will solidify our approval of it and all the ramifications associated with it.

We are also being told there is strength in numbers, and that now, we negotiate alone. In 2006, we, the smallest Postal union, will negotiate at the same time as the other unions, and we should get at least as much as they do. Ask yourself, has this happened before? What happened in 2002? Did our award have equal or better standards than the other unions? Were our standards reduced to less than the other unions?

It should also warrant mentioning that many carriers are afraid of the arbitrator we may get, thus voting accordingly with a "yes" vote. Simply because we kill this rat now does not mean we automatically go to arbitration, at least not yet.

But you can believe, if we ratify this extension, the Postal Service will give us NOTHING in 2006 and force us into arbitration when we have no leverage whatsoever. And if like last time, they force us to arbitration in 2006, there will be no mail count for up to two years, when we will be suffering under the worst mail count in memory.

The Board is presenting this to the membership as a viable offer, asking us to take a long long look at it, asking us to think about it, asking us to think about how it will affect us individually, and to vote accordingly. Would it not be better advice to have said, "We need to stand united and kill the rat before it kills us?"

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