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LABOR RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE: A
SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

City University of New York

PH.D. 1983

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LABOR RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

BY

THOMAS J. GERMANO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City
University of New York

1983

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1983

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

LABOR RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

THOMAS J. GERMANO

Adviser: Professor William Kornblum

Throughout its history, the American postal service has been characterized by a patronage "spoils system," coercive management control, and a labor force fragmented by craft jurisdictions and jealousies. But evolving alongside the formal structure was an elaborate and effective informal system of reward and control which was operative in postal workers' daily peer relationships. This informal organization engendered local political clubs and ethnic associations which eventually became an important basis for rank and file organizing of postal workers.

In 1970, almost one quarter million postal workers walked off their jobs in violation of federal law and against the wishes of their union leadership. The strike contributed to a major reorganization of the postal service and led to a reform movement within the postal unions. This

study examines the evolution of labor/management relations in this large scale federal bureaucracy. It pays special attention to the socialization patterns resulting from the division of labor and the effect these patterns have had on the militancy of postal workers. A second important line of analysis in this thesis deals with bureaucratic reaction to worker militancy.

The Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 established a set of labor/management relations similar to the private sector but outlawed the right to strike. The Act, which contains provisions for collective bargaining and arbitration, institutionalized major conflict within the postal service. Since 1971, the salaries of postal workers have risen dramatically while postal management has increased its control of the workplace through the application of scientific management. The number of craft employees has decreased and many networks of social organization have been destroyed. The number of supervisory personnel has increased and the ranks of the internal police force have tripled. Despite the rise of "militant" insurgents to positions of formal leadership, the postal unions have become increasingly ineffective at the bargaining table and have once again turned to more traditional lobbying tactics on Capitol Hill. There they find themselves facing a hostile Administration at a time when workers rank and file organizing has been subverted by bureaucratic dominance and control.

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INTRODUCTION

On March 18, 1970, employees of the United States Post Office Department went on strike in New York City. Within a few days almost a quarter of a million postal workers in two hundred cities across the nation had joined the walkout. This was the first major strike against the federal government since the signing of the Constitution. The strike, which lasted for eight days in New York City, and virtually shut down the entire United States postal system, was also the first national "wildcat" strike in American history. Adding to the uniqueness of this strike was the prevailing concept of the postal employee as humble and docile. This historic uprising took the nation by surprise. Postal management, the public, the federal government, and even the unions representing the postal workers were totally unprepared to deal with the strike and its reverberations throughout the American social structure.

In examining the predisposing and precipitating conditions leading to the strike emphasis will be placed upon discovering how and why a relatively passive group of workers were transformed into activists who, during the course of the work stoppage, confronted the U.S. military, deployed as strike breakers by President Richard M. Nixon. To help

clarify how workers functioning under strict bureaucratic control, and divided by craft distinctions as well as an elaborate system of internal labor market segmentation could collectively violate federal law and risk their jobs and personal security by striking against the federal government, it is necessary to examine the sociology of the postal work environment. First, specific attention will focus upon types of organizational structure and interpersonal relationships affecting the behavior of postal workers. Secondly, the primarily coercive formal system of management control, exemplified by the Postal Inspection Service will be contrasted to that of the informal but also effective utilitarian and normative-social systems of reward and control operative in postal workers' daily peer relationships. Third, this study will explore how the occupational community and the socialization patterns of postal workers contributed significantly to a Weltanschauung which eventually made collective action possible. Fourth, it will explain how the division of labor in the postal service is the basis for most of the patterns of social interaction and the resulting increase in or lack of solidarity among postal workers. Finally, the study affords an opportunity to examine the evolution of leadership because during the period 1969-81, when the research was conducted, a number of local rank and file insurgents eventually came to assume control of the national offices of the two largest postal

unions. The effect of this evolution on the union democracy issue as well as on labor-management relations in the postal service is considered toward the study's conclusion.

This study will focus on the Great Postal Strike of 1970, as a pivotal point in the altering of labor-management relationships in the United States postal service. It is concerned with organizational activities among the workers prior to the strike and will demonstrate how postal management, in response to worker militancy, has made deliberate adjustments in the division of labor in order to enhance its control of the workforce and to mitigate against the possibility of even more effective collective action by the postal employees.

This study relies heavily upon the work of Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman's classic, Union Democracy.¹ One of the most important propositions put forth in that study of democracy in the printers' union is the finding concerning the positive effects opposing political parties may have on the organization. Although no institutionalized two-party system exists in the postal union environment, as it does in the typographical union, the struggle for union democracy which followed the Great Postal Strike did establish sufficient structural changes

¹Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman, Union Democracy, with a Foreward by Clark Kerr (New York: Macmillan Co., Free Press, 1956).

and behavioral precedents to allow for the development of a legitimate competitive political system within the postal union community. Indeed, local rank and file parties and a national rank and file movement did emerge among the letter carriers following the Great Strike. These insurgent groups continued to influence both local and national union politics for much of the decade. Of key importance was the dissolution of these groups in 1976, at a time they appeared to be at the height of their success. Despite the rise and fall of formal opposition parties, the role of the informal and emergent leaders, in contrast to the formal union leadership remains an important feature of postal union politics.

The Great Postal Strike of 1970 contributed to a radical reorganization of the Post Office Department and created an entirely new structure of labor-management relations within the federal government. While postal workers have greatly improved their salary schedules since 1970, postal management has increased its control of the work environment during the same period. Although there has not been a major strike since reorganization, there have been two localized "wildcat" walkouts and each has been met with increasingly severe reprisals from postal management. After examining these events and developments a number of predictions concerning the likelihood and form of future collective action by postal workers appears in the conclusion of this

report.

This study suggests that a number of conditions were present in the postal community prior to the Great Strike of 1970, which, if they were recognized could have alerted the government, postal management, the unions, and the public to the approaching conflict. The research will show that although the strike itself was unique, many of the social and psychological explanations of factors associated with the strike were available in existing theories.

The 1970 postal strike was an historic uprising. The conflict generated precedent-setting changes in the structure of labor-management relations in the public sector. While this is an important study for anyone interested in industrial and labor relations, it is even more crucial for those concerned with the federal sector. A number of critical questions are raised by this research. When a group of apparently passive workers become activists, what conditions must be present for such change to occur? What factors might impede such a development? Might these variables be applied to other environments particularly within the work force of the federal bureaucracy? How many of these conditions are prevalent today? What can be expected in environments where these situations exist? What are some of the positive and negative effects of social conflict? This study will show that through the utilization of a sociological perspective these questions can be answered.

Methodology

The major methodological approach in this study, participant-observation, relies upon principles formulated by William Foote Whyte in his famous study of social structure in a Boston slum area.¹ However, variations in the classical application of this methodology do appear in this research and, therefore, must be noted. Because I was a member of the social system which I was studying, the problem many researchers face -- attempting to integrate and be accepted by the group -- did not apply in this case. I did not have trouble establishing rapport with other members of the group nor with eliciting the aid of "confidants." It would not have been possible to categorize anyone volunteering information in this study as an "informant" and maintain the best of relationships because of the totally negative perception of this term by postal workers. This feeling may well be shared by many working-class people.

During the course of the research I did not experience the "compulsion to confess" -- a common problem among field researchers noted by Kornblum in his study of a Chicago steel mill community.² Another problem faced by researchers utilizing the participant-observation methodology, "going

¹William Foote Whyte, Street Corner Society, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

²William Kornblum, Blue Collar Community, with a Foreword by Morris Janowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1974), p. 234.

native," i.e., overidentifying with the group, was not a situation with which I was confronted because I already was a full-fledged "native." However, the problems one experiences as a result of "going native" had to be faced. Regardless of how the researcher achieves "native" status, it leads to problems because it causes one to lose a certain amount of objectivity. During the early years of my collection of field notes, the question of overidentifying with the group seemed irrelevant. It was my belief that only an "insider," a full-fledged member of the group, could really understand and report on what was transpiring in the postal community. The most difficult thing for me to do during the entire project was to separate myself from the group enough to develop and maintain the degree of objectivity necessary to appropriately analyze the data and processes. After almost a quarter century of involvement with the postal community it seems unlikely that I will ever be completely removed emotionally from the postal environment. At best, from a scientific standpoint, I have developed a "detached compassion."

In addition to extensive field notes compiled on an almost daily basis from 1969-81, information was also obtained from personal interviews and discussions both in person and by telephone with postal workers and their families, political figures, postal patrons, local, regional and national union officials and postal managers, N.Y.C.

police, members of the National Guard activated during the Great Postal Strike, and individuals associated with the Postal Inspection Service. Other sources of information for this report include: books; journals; magazines; newspapers; audio and visual tapes; and a variety of union related literature including information bulletins, leaflets, meeting announcements, ballots, by-laws, contracts, convention reports, local and national newspapers and magazines, petitions and photographs.

Selecting the study group

The study focuses principally on the postal workers in N.Y.C., primarily those employed at the General Post Office (GPO) in Manhattan and particularly the letter carriers. The Manhattan GPO is important because of the tremendous amount of mail processed there and the fact that it employed more postal workers than any other facility, more than eleven thousand in 1970. Almost every job classification, workshift, and function involving postal employees existed at the Manhattan GPO. The building also served as the headquarters for regional postal management, including offices of the Postal Inspection Service. The letter carriers of GPO played an important role in the Great Strike of 1970, and it was only when the General Post Office workers returned to duty that the strike officially ended. Further, throughout the eight days of the strike the media paid much attention to the picket lines outside the General Post

Office, and the public to a large degree, came to identify the conflict between the federal government and its postal employees through the image of striking workers dwarfed by the colossal General Post Office structure with its numerous steps, massive Roman columns and facade containing a four foot high inscription: "NEITHER SNOW NOR HAIL NOR SLEET NOR GLOOM OF NIGHT STAYS THESE COURIERS FROM THE SWIFT COMPLETION OF THEIR APPOINTED ROUNDS."

Interviews and observations

The majority of discussions and interviews took place in areas the postal employees utilize for work breaks inside as well as outside the post office. These included employee locker rooms, coffee shops, eateries and taverns (often the tavern was also an eatery, serving food as well as alcoholic beverages). Many conversations took place in the "swing room," a specially designated area of the post office away from the work area where postal employee congregated after lunch and coffee breaks or while waiting for their work shift to begin. Parcel post carriers were often interviewed in the truck from which they were delivering packages. Many discussions and observations occurred in the carriers' "personal places." These are usually located on the carrier's delivery route and afford the carrier "protection" from supervisors, the general public and postal inspectors. It is a place where a carrier can take an unofficial break from work, i.e., still be "on the

clock" but not performing official duties. In these personal places the carrier relaxes and is joined only by a trusted individual or two. Observations in these areas were especially important because it showed that the carrier trusted the observer and gave the observer an opportunity to see who else the carrier trusted enough to share his personal place with.

Other conversations took place with postal employees while they were travelling to and from work, in subway trains, automobiles, and while walking. A few observations occurred at special events. These were baseball games, fishing trips, demonstrations (for or against a union related activity), union meetings and conventions.

"Confidants" and
"opinion leaders"

These four individuals were shop stewards during much of the time the research was conducted. Each was extremely cooperative and invaluable to the study. They represented some of the major carrier classifications analyzed in the report. These are regular first-class business routeman, regular parcel post route routeman, regular first-class residential routeman, and collector. As elected shop stewards they had access to and were trusted by the other letter carriers. They reported on work related as well as social activities involving the study group. The research also contains extended discussions with individuals regarded

as "opinion leaders" because they held no formal representative role but were more or less "in tune" with the mood of the members and were often sought out by the members for guidance and advice. During the course of the study, some of the opinion leaders became formal leaders as a result of their being elected shop steward.

No one, including the confidants, knew exactly why I was gathering the data. Many were curious and had a "good idea" of what it was about, particularly the opinion leaders. Most believed the research was related "to school" or "a book" or some type of politics within the letter carriers' union. Only now, with the research completed and the writing of the dissertation underway, have I explained to what use the data is being applied. Those aware of this have expressed both pleasure and interest because, they agree, "it is about time someone will tell what it's really like to work in the postal service." The fact that I was a full-fledged member of the group who had served as both an informal and formal leader added immeasurably to my ability to have access to important information as well as individuals. My relationship with the postal workers, particularly the letter carriers, was highly credible since it was based upon mutual trust and respect. I believe that because I "paid my dues" it enhanced the research data by providing the study with comments and observations which would not otherwise have been made evident.

Personal history

My involvement with the United States postal service began in 1958 when I was appointed as a substitute clerk. In 1959, I was promoted to regular clerk and transferred to the "graveyard shift" (7:00 P.M. - 3:30 A.M.) at the Bronx General Post Office. I resigned in January 1960, after working three months as a regular clerk. From October 1960, to January 1961, I worked as a substitute letter carrier in the Flushing, New York post office. I was reinstated as a substitute clerk in October 1963, and assigned to the late shift at the General Post Office in Manhattan. In April 1964, I transferred to letter carrier and worked as a substitute and then regular at the General Post Office until December 1970, when I was elected to a full time position in the letter carriers' union. I served as Executive Vice President of the New York Letter Carriers Union, Branch 36, of the National Association of Letter Carriers from January 1971, until February 1975. After being defeated in an election for the presidency of Branch 36, in 1975, I returned to duty as a regular letter carrier at the General Post Office in Manhattan. In October 1976, I resigned from the postal service and accepted an extension faculty position with Cornell University's New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations. My relationship with postal unions since that time has focused primarily upon research and education. In addition to compiling data

for this study, I have served as coordinator and instructor for a number of labor relations courses and seminars for postal unions. These have included such topics as: labor history, contract administration, collective bargaining and arbitration. These activities have helped me keep aware of conditions in the postal environment and have been a tremendous asset in gathering information contained in this report.

While working at the post office I enrolled at Queens College in 1965 and was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology in 1971. As an undergraduate student I began to develop an interest in the dynamics of the postal environment beyond my own job function. Until 1969, I naively perceived postal employment as unrelated to the larger social structure. It was only after being encouraged by my instructors to develop a "sociological imagination" that I began to grasp the relationship between my own milieu and the course of history. This newly discovered perspective allowed me to distinguish between my personal troubles and the public issues of social structure and was a major factor in my transition from an indifferent to an activist postal worker. Applying this crucial knowledge was not easy, but shortly after acquiring this "sociological imagination" I attended my first postal union meeting. Within a year, I had become a strike captain, shop steward and full time union officer.

I was accepted into the Ph.D. program in Sociology at the City University Graduate Center in September 1971. Faculty at the Graduate Center advised me to combine my academic discipline and occupational experience in an "industrial sociology" concentration. During my years of study at the Graduate Center the "sociology of work" received increasing emphasis. This development has been especially beneficial to my particular orientation. This study could not have been completed without the extraordinary assistance, encouragement, patience, understanding and support which I have received from the Graduate Center faculty.

PART ONE

POSTAL SERVICE IN AMERICA 1753-1969

Chapter I

THE EVOLUTION OF THE POSTAL SERVICE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

It is impossible to understand how postal workers in the United States eventually came to organize for militant action without a solid background in how the mail system in the U.S. evolved in the public sector. All of the problems and obstacles to concerted collective action which the postal workers faced at the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s had their antecedents in the structure of the postal service and of the work of postal workers as these developed in the nineteenth century. In summarizing this history, a number of sociological themes stand out, all of which bear on the relations of the postal service to the dominant social structures of American society.

Perhaps foremost among the major social forces which shape industrial relations in the postal service is the evolution of the mail system in the American public sector. We shall see that the postal worker has been a "public servant" since the founding of the American Republic. A consequence of the fact that postal workers have always been federal, public employees is that they have been dependent upon Congressional legislation to establish wages, hours of

work, and working conditions. As a federally created bureaucratic administration, the United States postal service has always been subject to intense public scrutiny on the one hand, and, on the other, it has been directly involved in the vast, informal network of political patronage at all levels of the society. From this fundamental aspect of postal service organization arise a number of more specific features of postal work in a federal bureaucracy:

- A. Postal work historically goes through periods of drastic "boom and bust" as Congress is more or less responsive to the economic needs of postal workers in a fluctuating economy dominated by private sector capital. In one decade post office work may be seen as highly desirable, while in another it may be the most neglected and underpaid public sector work in the nation
- B. Reliance on political influence in Congress creates the conditions for a pervasive dependence throughout the postal service on patronage in all forms. The function of patronage politics for individual and collective advancement also creates the conditions for ethnic politics and ethnic patronage throughout the history of postal work

C. As a federal bureaucracy steeped in the imagery and ideologies of efficiency, dedicated service, and above all, the security of the mails, the postal service develops an especially rigid system of employee discipline which is supported by perhaps the most elaborate system of internal inspection and enforcement of any bureaucracy in American History

A second set of social forces which shapes the current situation of postal workers in America was set in motion during the period of urbanization and industrialization in the United States from the end of the Civil War through the post World War II period. As the United States went from a society which was 80percent rural in the 1870s, to one which was more than 80 percent urban by the 1970s the characteristics of employment in the postal service underwent transformation which were to have dramatic political outcomes by the decade of the 1960s.

The urbanization of America created a major cleavage in the postal service which persists today. The rural letter carriers and their supporting clerks in small town and village post offices had dominated both the ethos and the work environment of the mails since the American colonial period. The image of the friendly letter carrier who carried the mail through storms of bad weather or social strife and who stopped for pie and milk at the friendly

farmer's cottage began to give way as urbanization accelerated into the twentieth century. By the end of World War II the postal workers in huge urban mail facilities were the dominant segment of the service's labor force. These urban letter carriers and clerks had yet to exert themselves politically at the national level. The story of this thesis is largely that of the urban postal workers who struggle to overcome their atomization as workers and throw off the stultifying image of the mailman as the faithful public servant who will tolerate any conditions which the society sees fit to perpetuate.

Urbanization inevitably led to industrialization of the mails. The rise of air mail, parcel post, special delivery, bulk mail handling, machine processing of the mail, the mail order industry all created the need for thousands of additional postal workers who would largely be employed in the metropolitan centers. This rapid industrialization of the mails had equally dramatic consequences for the nature of postal work and the composition of the labor force in the postal services:

- A. Industrialization of the mails brought increased occupational divisions into the mail system which heightened the problems of craft versus industrial unionism in the service
- B. The growth of employment in the cities brought increased ethnic, racial, and gender diversity to

to the service. On the one hand this new diversity increased the tendency of the workers to form separate ethnic associations. On the other hand, it also brought urban workers with blue collar organizing predispositions into a service which had traditionally been dominated by more passive rural letter carriers and urban civil service clerks

- C. Industrialization of the mails created occupational safety hazards and severe new occupational pressures for timely delivery of ever increasing volumes of mail. These new conditions and demands on the workers continue to contribute to worker militancy in the postal occupations

Each of these social forces was set in motion early in the history of the postal service but required many decades before becoming precipitating factors in the inevitable industrial strife which culminated in the wild-cat strike of 1970. In the brief history of the United States postal service provided here, these social forces necessarily overlap. But each is highlighted over and again throughout the story of the postal employees' attempts to achieve modern labor management relations in their industry.

The Postal Service: An Historical Overview

The British postal system in America

Postal service in America began with the original colonies but did not achieve any sort of dependability until Benjamin Franklin was made Deputy Postmaster General for the Colonies, in 1753. Franklin and his co-Postmaster General, William Hunter, instituted a series of reforms which were so successful the postal service was able to realize its first annual profit in 1758, and remained so until 1775.

On January 3, 1774, Franklin, considered politically unreliable by the British government, was summarily dismissed from his postal service position. The service deteriorated rapidly after Franklin's removal and by December 1775, the Crown closed the New York City post office. For all practical purposes this was the end of the British postal service in America. Officially, however, the system continued until October 17, 1782, when the Continental Congress passed the ordinance which established its own postal system.

During the years 1766-75, the British postal system in America was prosperous but not peaceful. The Sons of Liberty, perceiving the service as another means of British taxation, had so disrupted the postal system that an independent rebel system had replaced the British postal service in most of the major colonial communities.

The American postal system

On July 26, 1775, the Continental Congress established an American postal system and named Benjamin Franklin as its Postmaster General. Franklin's connection with the postal service lasted only until he was designated Commissioner to France in September 1776.

The first Postmaster General under the new Constitution was Samuel Osgood. The term first used to describe the U.S. postal service was "General Post Office." In 1825, the name Post Office Department became the official term for the postal service. Congress did not formally recognize the Post Office Department as an executive department of the government until 1873. President Andrew Jackson was the first to designate the Postmaster General a cabinet member. Prior to 1829, the Postmaster Generals reported to the President through the Secretary of the Treasury. Jackson introduced the "spoils system" to the postal service. Only members of the dominant political party were able to become or maintain the job of postmaster. In 1836, near the end of Jackson's second term, Congress assumed financial control of the Post Office Department. This control was not relinquished until 1971.

In 1863, Congress authorized free city delivery service. With free city delivery came the first modern mailmen. On July 1, 1863, approximately 450 letter carriers began delivering mail on the streets of the

forty-nine largest cities in the United States. The letter carriers worked seven days a week, 365 days a year for an average annual salary of \$670. The actual wage was left to the discretion of the individual postmasters. Like all other postal employees the letter carriers were politically appointed and were usually replaced whenever a federal administration changed.

Civil service

In 1883, the first federal civil service law went into effect. Although not all inclusive, because postmasters were excluded, the law did reduce the impact of the patronage system on the postal service. The law required a competitive examination for all letter carriers and postal clerks in post offices with fifty or more employees. It also prohibited the solicitation of political contributions on federal property and outlawed compulsory contributions to political campaigns, a common practice prior to the passage of this bill. "Voluntary" collections for political campaigns continued. And above all, the act specified that government workers would be guaranteed a standard eight-hour day. Unfortunately, this eight-hour day would not become a reality for postal workers. Labor historians like Pelling and Brooks who focus primarily on workers in the private sector, often point to the eight-hour day legislation as creating a model for industrial workers who would struggle for more than another generation to win the same work day

norms that Congress granted government workers. The truth of the matter, however, is that the eight-hour day "victory" took much longer for the organizationally fragmented postal workers to achieve.

The struggle for the eight hour day

In 1889, John Wanamaker was Postmaster General. In that same year, the Ancient and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor claimed 750,000 members in six thousand locals throughout the nation--and the letter carriers were ripe for organizing. On August 30, 1889, approximately one hundred mailmen met in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and founded the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC). Among the many reprisals postal management instituted against the letter carriers was the disclaiming of the validity of the eight-hour day law of 1888. When Congress upheld the law's application for letter carriers, the postal service countered with an interpretation of the law declaring an eight-hour day really meant a fifty-six hour week. Letter carriers, according to postal management could work nine hours a day for six days in a week and at the end of that week would owe the postal service two hours work. When this interpretation was put into effect throughout the postal system the letter carriers sued for unpaid overtime for the extra hours that they had been forced to work. The Supreme Court, in 1893, decided the case in favor of the letter

carriers. The settlement involved more than three million dollars in back pay and greatly enhanced the prestige of the NALC. John N. Parsons, General Master Workman of the Ancient and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, who was also a letter carrier, was elected president of the NALC. The postal clerks followed the organizing lead of the letter carriers. In 1890, thirty delegates met in Washington, D. C. and formed the National Federation of Post Office Clerks.

Working conditions

The effect of the Civil Service Act was not entirely positive for the postal employees. With postal workers no longer able to help Congressmen get elected, most Congressmen lost interest in their welfare. Working conditions deteriorated and the pay remained low. In 1889, twenty-five years after the institution of the free city delivery service, many letter carriers were earning the same salary as in 1863. Letter carriers had, through the efforts of Samuel Cox, a sympathetic and influential Congressman, obtained an annual leave policy of fifteen days, as well as an eight-hour work day. The law, however, did not state that the eight hours had to be consecutive and letter carriers usually found themselves on the job for eighteen hours a day before the eight hours of work and pay were realized. About 50 percent of the total letter carrier work force was employed in small post offices and, therefore, not

protected by civil service.

As bad as the working conditions were for the letter carriers, they were even worse for the postal clerks who were without a Congressional representative championing their cause. Postal clerks received no vacations or days off. They earned less pay than letter carriers and 90 percent of the postal clerks worked 365 days a year. Their average work day was fourteen hours. The working conditions of postal clerks in 1889 is further described by Gerald Cullinan: "...their workrooms were filthy; dirty mailbags filled the air with dust. Tuberculosis was the occupational disease, so much so that it was known in the service as the 'clerks' sickness'."¹

Management oppression and
government intervention

During Wanamaker's four years as Postmaster General, the post office experienced a number of drastic changes. He was personally responsible for the invention of letter boxes at the door of people's homes and is credited with the institution of parcel post, rural free delivery, and postal savings. While these innovations increased the responsibilities of the letter carriers, the salary was the same as it had been in 1888. In fact, the postal employees' salary in 1901 had barely risen over the wage rate paid in

¹Gerald Cullinan, The United States Postal Service, with a Foreword by James A. Farley (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 109.

1863.

When the postal employees became restive and started organizing political campaigns in an attempt to remedy the low pay and poor working conditions, President Theodore Roosevelt responded with an extraordinary Executive Order. Known as the infamous "gag rule," Roosevelt's Order prohibited all federal and postal employees from:

...directly or indirectly, individually or through associations, to solicit an increase in pay or to influence or attempt to influence in their own interest any other legislation whatever, either before Congress or its Committees, or in any way save through the heads of the Departments in or under which they serve, on penalty of dismissal from the Government service.¹

This harsh and apparently unconstitutional rule remained in effect until passage of the Lloyd-LaFollette Act in 1912. During the decade the rule was enforced the most active and outspoken employee leaders had been dismissed from the postal service, in most cases for violating the "gag rule."

In Chicago, local leaders of the letter carriers and clerks smuggled members of the Illinois State Commission on Occupational Diseases into the post office to inspect the unsanitary conditions. When the investigators issued their report, postal management not only refused to improve the working conditions, they fired the leader of the postal

¹ Ibid., p. 118

clerks' local for having violated the "gag rule." The National Federation of Post Office Clerks responded by electing the dismissed clerk, Oscar F. Nelson, its national president. That same year, 1906, the National Federation of Postal Clerks affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Working conditions continued to deteriorate as postal management's oppression of employee representatives accelerated.

Postmaster General Albert Burleson fired the president of the Railway Mail Association and the president of the Rural Letter Carriers Association on the same day. To the president of the NALC, he offered a choice to quit either the postal service or his union position. Edward J. Gainor's choice to maintain his position with the NALC was supported by the NALC membership who retained him in office from 1915-41.

Burleson arbitrarily decided that letter carriers who collect mail would be paid less than those who delivered mail. He also decreed that any employee absent for more than 150 days in a year would be automatically dismissed. It mattered not if the employee had been injured on the job or contracted an illness while working. Railway clerks were particularly affected by this ruling because their injury rate was the highest of all postal employees. In an average year mail cars were involved in three hundred wrecks, killing or disabling approximately 150 or 3 percent

of the total railway clerk force.

The plight of the postal employees was further aggravated by a drastic rise in the cost of living. In 1916, the dollar was worth only 50 percent of what it had been in 1907, the year of the last pay increase for postal employees. In 1917 and 1918, inflation soared 20.3 percent and 22.4 percent respectively. In 1917, Congress had voted a 10 percent pay increase for federal employees, but Burleson was able to have postal workers excluded. By 1917, approximately 10 percent of all postal employees quit their jobs. Many more left to serve in the armed forces. At the same time, applicants for postal employment had declined by almost 20 percent.

The discontent and oppression reached a peak in Fairmount, West Virginia in 1915, when twenty-five postal employees resigned en masse. Gerald Cullinan describes the consequences of this action:

This was not really a strike. The employees were not bargaining for anything. They had no intention of returning to their jobs. They were simply fed up with the brutal and despotic treatment.

The federal authorities took a different view. All 25 were arrested. Since they didn't have the money to pay for their defense they threw themselves upon the mercy of the court by pleading nolo contendere. This was a mistake. All were assessed heavy fines.

All, that is, but one. W. H. Fisher, a letter carrier, obviously deranged by the harassment he had received at the hands of the authorities, hanged himself in his cell on the night before his trial.

There have been no mass resignations from the postal service since that time. The employees, evidently, got

the message.¹

The Unions respond

During this especially difficult turn of the century period and continuing through the infamous "gag rule" decade, the clerks' organization was asserting itself while the carriers' association appeared to be in retreat. When James C. Keller, President of the NALC, a staunch and vociferous opponent of the "gag rule," was summarily fired from his job as a letter carrier, the NALC elected J. D. Holland as his successor. The NALC leadership resisted affiliation with the AFL believing independence the least dangerous route to take. While the NALC vacillated, the clerks' organization moved ahead. In 1907, wages of postal clerks were for the first time made the equivalent of letter carriers. In 1910, the National Federation of Postal Clerks attempted to recruit letter carriers into their organization. The AFL, still hopeful that the NALC would affiliate, intervened and prevented this pirating of members. In 1913, the NALC ordered a referendum on the question of affiliation which was conducted in early 1914. The vote by the letter carriers was overwhelmingly against affiliation. In 1917, the Postal Clerks merged with the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. This new organization, the

¹Idem, The Mail Man (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Letter Carriers, 1972), p. 18.

National Federation of Postal Employees, moved to enlist dissident members of the NALC. The AFL refused to directly involve itself in the controversy but notified the NALC that only through affiliation would protection of its members be assured.

The NALC leadership still fearful of affiliation and concerned about losing its "identity" as well as its independence was caught in a bind. Refusal to affiliate could quite possibly bring about the eventual collapse of the Association. At the 1917 NALC national convention in Dallas, Texas, delegates overwhelmingly voted for affiliation with the AFL. In the subsequent referendum, letter carriers by an almost twenty to one ratio, supported affiliation.

The brief human relations period

During the decade of the 1920s a new perspective on organizational behavior was developing in America. A series of studies conducted by the Harvard Business School at the Hawthorne Works of Western Electric radically altered the existing assumptions concerning human behavior in the workplace. The Hawthorne Studies and the "human relations school" they produced focused on the importance of the social system and its relationship to employee morale and worker productivity. This approach contrasted greatly with the highly impersonal scientific management school of

industrial and labor relations which had come to dominate American industry beginning toward the end of the nineteenth century. While the human relations school would not receive wide spread application throughout the American industrial system for a number of years, a reasonable facsimile of this approach to employee-management relations received a brief though apparently successful application in the U.S. postal system.

In 1920, Congress enacted legislation which significantly affected postal employees. The Reclassification Act raised salaries to a minimum of fourteen hundred dollars. Maximum became nineteen hundred dollars per year. The Act also provided fifteen days of annual vacation and ten days of sick leave per year. The Act further required the postal service to observe all federal holidays. The first Civil Service Retirement Act was also passed by Congress in 1920.

The pendulum swung full cycle concerning the style of management behavior and employee relations with the resignation of Albert S. Burleson and the appointment of Will H. Hays as Postmaster General in 1921. Although Hays served only one year as Postmaster General, he instituted a style of management that completely altered the dynamics of postal labor relations. Hays adopted a "human relations" approach to postal employee-management interactions. Hays established a bureau of "service relations" which improved

the working conditions of postal employees. He had an "open door" policy for representatives of the various postal organizations and met regularly with leaders of the postal unions. He reinstated with full seniority all postal employees who had served in the armed forces during the war. He rejected the mandatory retirement of postal workers at age sixty-five. Upon assuming office, Hays issued a declaration stating that the postal service is not designed to be a profit making institution but one which provides service, and which must eliminate the concept of labor as merely a commodity. The effect of Hays' policies on the postal work force was dramatic. Accompanying the upsurge in morale was an increase in productivity which more than offset the entire cost of the previous year's wage increase.

Service vs. the profit motive

When Calvin Coolidge issued the first presidential veto of a postal employee pay bill in 1924, he cited failures of Congress to raise the postage rates to pay for it. This debate concerning the concept of the post office as a business versus a service continues even today. The argument raised by the employee organizations in 1924 are worthy of note. Basically they state that, indeed the postal service is a service and not a business and its products are not priced in the marketplace but by statute. Further, if

Congress which can arbitrarily set the price of the product, i.e., rates of postage, determines not to increase these rates, it is unfair to inflict a hardship on postal employees because of this often politically motivated reluctance. Actually, the relationship between postal revenues and salaries was much more indirect because all income went to the Treasury Department while funds to operate the post office were appropriated by Congress.

The great depression and the "New Deal"

When the Great Depression hit the United States in 1929, postal employment for the first time in history became desirable to a large segment of the American population. The salary which ranged from seventeen hundred to twenty-one hundred dollars per year was quite attractive to a nation with thirteen million of its work force unemployed. The Depression, however, had adverse effects on the postal service. Mail volume which had reached a peak of 27,952 million had, by 1933, dropped to 19,868 million. Business mail had drastically declined and the decreasing revenue created a "panic" in the Hoover Administration. Postmaster General Walter F. Brown, "furloughed" all postal clerks and carriers without pay for one month each year. He further proposed the immediate dismissal of four thousand employees and an additional 11 percent reduction in the salaries of anyone maintained on the postal payroll. Congress

rejected these additional cuts primarily because Hoover and his Postmaster General were lame-duck officials soon to be replaced by a Democratic Administration headed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt's Postmaster General was James A. Farley.

One of Roosevelt's first acts as president was the ordering of a 15 percent reduction in all federal salaries. The effect was devastating to postal employees. Combined with the furloughs, this reduction in pay brought postal salaries to a slightly lower level than they had been in 1916, when Burleson was Postmaster General. Roosevelt soon found himself in a bind. On the one hand, he was attempting to pressure private enterprise into raising wages and increasing employment while, on the other hand, he had reduced the wages of government workers and eliminated twenty-six thousand postal jobs. Roosevelt met great resistance from the federal employee organizations because of these policies. Ultimately, this opposition enveloped the congress. The first override of a major Roosevelt veto came in March 1934, when Congress voted to restore the president's pay cuts for federal workers.

In 1936, mail volume began to increase as the economy started to work its way out of the depression. While the cost of living rose, postal employees' wages remained static. In fact, the salaries of postal workers in 1941 were the same as they had been in 1925. Once again the postal service

experienced problems recruiting employees. The fact that war related industries were paying much higher wages than the postal service further exaggerated this problem.

Dissension within the NALC

Dissatisfaction with the wages and working conditions led to discontent within the postal unions. In 1938, a group of letter carriers from Indiana began a movement to force a national referendum, which, if successful, would have called for the election of national officers of the NALC by direct vote, i.e., mail ballot instead of by convention. The movement to conduct the referendum was successful, however, the amendment was defeated by a better than three to one margin with 72 percent of the membership participating in the vote.

The next attempt to unseat the incumbent NALC officers occurred at the Golden Anniversary Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in September 1939. A resolution was introduced which, if passed, would have made it unconstitutional for any national officer to seek reelection if he had passed his sixty-fifth birthday. This amendment, if successful, would have effectively prevented the incumbent president, Edward Gainor, and three other national officers from running for office. Although the resolution was narrowly defeated, the manner in which the president addressed the issue and conducted the vote was so controversial, that an irreconcilable split developed among the

NALC's national board of officers.

In 1941, the question of the sixty-five year old age limit was placed before the membership in a national referendum spearheaded by the opposition to the incumbents which by then included seven of the twenty-two national officers. Approximately 90 percent of the NALC membership voted in the referendum and the close vote, 26,583 to 23,838, supporting the amendment closed out the careers of the four older national officers.¹ The leader of the declared opposition, William C. Doherty, himself a national officer in Gainor's administration, was elected president without opposition at the 1941 NALC convention in Los Angeles, California. While Doherty supported the age limitation for national officers he never wavered in his opposition to direct election of national officers. Doherty served as NALC president until 1962, when he accepted an appointment as the first United States Ambassador to Jamaica. Under Doherty's leadership, the NALC concentrated much of its energy and resources building an effective lobbying arm of the union.

The war years

World War II had an especially negative effect on postal employees, because fifty-six thousand regular postal workers left to serve in the armed forces. The salary, much

¹William C. Doherty, Mailman U.S.A. (New York: David McKay Company, 1960), p. 156.

less than the war industries were offering, had not been raised since 1925. Once again postal employment was less than desirous. In 1943, a temporary three hundred dollar increase was finally extracted from Congress. This was followed by permanent increases in 1945, 1946, 1948, 1949 and 1951. By 1952, the salaries of postal workers ranged from \$3,270 to \$4,370, and were approaching comparability with similar jobs in private industry. The end of the war had brought the return of many veterans to the postal service, and caused a reduction of wartime industries. The post office had no problem recruiting an adequate work force. By 1952, the postal service employed almost half a million people.

The Eisenhower years

In 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected President of the United States. Eisenhower appointed his campaign manager, Arthur E. Summerfield, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, to the position of Postmaster General. Summerfield espoused the philosophy that the postal service could balance its budget and even operate at a profit. During the eight years Eisenhower was President and Summerfield was Postmaster General the postal employees received three pay increases. One of these, in 1960, was realized only after Congress overrode the President's veto. Three other vetoes of postal pay raises by Eisenhower in 1954, 1955 and 1957 were not overridden. The pay raise that

was approved in 1955 was part of Public Law 68 which reclassified all postal workers. Clerks and carriers were relegated to level four of the postal pay structure. This level was then equated with Grade 5 employees throughout the rest of the government's services. Most federal workers in Grade 5 were women working as clerks and secretaries. While Grade 5 for government workers is usually a temporary status in an employee's career, the corresponding classification, level four, in postal employment, was for almost 90 percent of the clerks and letter carriers a permanent position. The linking of these two statuses for purposes of pay increase consideration would adversely affect the economic condition of postal workers. At the end of the second Eisenhower term of office postal clerks' and letter carriers' salaries ranged from \$4,345 to \$5,605. Comparable workers in private industry were receiving much higher wages and other civil servants, most notably police and firemen, who at one time were in approximately the same pay bracket as postal employees, were earning considerably more. In many communities, postal pay was less than that of garbage men and bus drivers.

Formal labor/management
relations: Executive
Order 10988

In 1960, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was elected President of the United States and the following year he formed a Presidential Task Force to study employee-management rela-

tions in the federal service. On January 17, 1962, President Kennedy, relying heavily on recommendations of the Task Force issued Executive Order 10988. This order established, for the first time, an official policy of labor-management relations in the postal service. Kennedy's order was in response to increasing pressure from the federal employee organizations particularly the postal unions. Commenting on Kennedy's issuance of Executive Order 10988 Murray Nesbitt writes:

His executive order was in part precipitated by the possibility that congressional action might foist on federal management a comprehensive, formal system of labor relations it was not fully prepared to accept.... Years of campaigning on the part of the postal unions preceded the event.¹

Kennedy's order provided the framework for collective bargaining while establishing a policy of recognition for the postal employee organizations. The collective bargaining, however, was severely limited because major items such as wages, fringe benefits, and hours of work were excluded. These areas would remain under the control of Congress until passage of the Postal Reorganization Act in 1971.

In June 1962, almost four hundred thousand postal workers participated in elections to designate their union representatives. When the results were in, six major postal unions were granted exclusive national recognition. These

¹Murray B. Nesbitt, Labor Relations in the Federal Government Service (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, 1976), p. 316.

unions were: United Federation of Postal Clerks, National Association of Letter Carriers, National Rural Letter Carriers Association, National Association of Post Office and General Service Maintenance Employees, National Federation of Post Office Motor Vehicles Employees, National Association of Special Delivery Messengers. All but the Rural Letter Carriers Association were affiliates of the AFL-CIO. In 1964, the Mail Handlers Union received national exclusive recognition.

Four other postal unions, all independent, received national formal recognition. These included: National Postal Union, Postal Supervisors, Postal Alliance and the National League of Postmasters. A union with exclusive recognition had the right to negotiate for the unit while a union with formal recognition had only a right to be consulted on personnel policy. To receive formal recognition an organization had to consist of at least 10 percent of a unit's employees. Another type of recognition allowed under Executive Order 10988 was informal. This gave an organization with less than 10 percent of the unit's employees the right to voice an opinion to management on matters related to personnel.

Agreements under Executive Order 10988

The first national postal agreement was signed in March 1963 and went into effect April 1, 1963. Subsequent

agreements were reached in 1964, 1966 and 1968. The latter was the first national agreement with a two year duration period. It went into effect in March 1968, and was to expire in March 1970. The postal strike of March 1970 effectively terminated this agreement and ushered in a new structure of labor-management relations in the postal service.

The four agreements reached under the system mandated by Executive Order 10988 caused a great deal of friction between postal management and employee representatives. Management resented the unions for becoming involved in areas in which they previously had no right. The result was a disruption of management's ability to control the workforce. One example cited by management was where a dismissed employee was allowed to remain on active duty status until his appeal was processed at the regional level. This often meant a ninety day period during which management felt powerless in dealing with the employee who, expecting to be fired, might become increasingly disruptive.

Neutral decision makers

The unions also opposed the discipline and appeal procedures and objected to the absence of a "neutral" decision maker from any step in the process. The unions perceived management as accuser, judge and jury. When a

"neutral" was involved in the grievance procedure or negotiations, the unions were distrustful and accused him of being management oriented. This suspicion on the part of the unions was not unfounded. The provisions which covered advisory arbitration and optional mediation were decidedly favorable to management. Grievances pertaining to contract interpretation could be arbitrated only if management agreed. Mediation, if unsuccessful, resulted in the mediator making confidential recommendations to management and not the unions, although the unions paid half the cost of the mediator's services. This distrust of "neutral" decision makers has never been resolved for the postal unions and has continued to create problems in postal labor relations.

From crisis to
corporation concept

While the employee organizations were spending a lot of time negotiating the items that were negotiable, the issues most important to the overwhelming number of postal workers were languishing in the halls of Congress. Lyndon B. Johnson, who had ascended to the presidency upon the assassination of John F. Kennedy, in November 1963, issued a series of wage guidelines. Intended for the private as well as the public sector, Johnson's guidelines called for annual wage increases of not more than 2.3 percent. The President was unable to enforce these guidelines in the

private sphere but he was able to rigidly apply them to the federal realm. The result was a widening gap between postal worker salaries and comparable occupations in private industry. Unable to keep pace with a rising cost of living, the postal service once again found it almost impossible to recruit or retain quality employees. In 1967, the postal service experienced a 26 percent turnover rate. Accompanying an unstable work force and a sliding scale of real wages was a deterioration in the quality of mail service. The President, Congress and the Postmaster General were all preoccupied with things of apparently greater consequence than the postal service. For the President and Congress, it was the Viet Nam War. For Lawrence F. O'Brien, Johnson's Postmaster General, it was lobbying for the President on Capitol Hill. Gerald Cullinan, writing about the 1966 breakdown in mail service is extremely critical of Postmaster General O'Brien's handling of postal responsibilities. He also places much of the blame for O'Brien's "part-time" Postmaster Generalship on Lyndon B. Johnson. Cullinan states:

Many observers felt the crisis would never have happened if the Postmaster General had been permitted to attend to his job instead of acting as the President's errand boy on Capitol Hill.¹

The mail crisis Cullinan refers to occurred in

¹Cullinan, The United States Postal Service, p. 174.

Chicago, at the world's largest post office, in October 1966, where more than one million pounds of mail jammed up. The backlog spread throughout a number of major cities in the Midwest. O'Brien appealed to the Bureau of the Budget for emergency funds to help break the log jam of mail. Thirty million dollars was allocated and primarily utilized to pay overtime to career employees who worked as many as sixteen hours a day to clean up the mess. O'Brien, believing the entire postal system was on the verge of breaking down, appointed a private task force to report on the overall structure and status of the Post Office Department. Based on the report of these consultants, O'Brien, in March 1967, recommended to President Johnson, that a postal corporation be established and the position of Postmaster General be abolished. The President immediately appointed the Commission on Postal Organization.

The Commission was headed by Frederick R. Kappel, retired Chairman of the Board of AT&T, and came to be known as the Kappel Commission. In June 1968, the Commission submitted its report to the President. Johnson agreed in principle with the findings of the Commission and the recommendation to replace the old Post Office Department with a government owned corporation. However, a number of factors were present which prevented any decisive action on the part of the President. First, Johnson was at the time of the Commission's report, a "lame-duck," having announced his

decision not to seek reelection later that year. Second, Lawrence O'Brien, a staunch proponent of the corporation concept was no longer Postmaster General. He had been replaced by W. Morris Watson, who had strong reservations about a postal corporation and definite disagreements with some of the Kappel Commission's analysis. Another factor prohibiting any public commitment to the corporation proposal was the lack of a consensus in Congress. It was an election year and the Viet Nam War issue dominated political thinking. Finally, the postal unions were opposed to a corporation structure that would inhibit their traditional access to Congress where they felt most past benefits had been obtained.

Nixon and the postal workers

Toward the end of 1968, James H. Rademacher was elected president of the NALC and Richard Milhous Nixon was elected President of the United States. In 1969, Nixon appointed the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Winton M. Blount, Postmaster General. Nixon and Blount were in favor of a postal corporation similar to that which had been proposed by the Kappel Commission. Nixon's proposals were embodied in a bill introduced by Rep. Morris K. Udall (Dem., Ariz.). The postal unions, still opposed to the corporation concept, were supporting another bill, H.R. 4, which had been submitted by Rep. Thaddeus J. Dulski (Dem., N.Y.). The Dulski bill was designed to accomplish major

postal reforms without removing the Post Office Department from Congress' authority. The unions were led in their opposition to the Udall bill and their support of the Dulski bill by the newly elected president of the NALC. In October 1969, President Nixon issued Executive Order 11491, which was to become effective in January 1970. The order provided for negotiated grievance and arbitration procedures while indicating the end of formal and informal union recognition. This created a furor among the independent unions especially the National Postal Union with its almost sixty thousand members. The unions' reaction to E.O. 11491 was manifested in an increased outpouring of support for the Dulski bill, H.R. 4.

While the hearings on the Dulski bill dragged on, President Nixon announced that he would veto any pay increase for postal workers unless it was part of a postal corporation package. Dulski, who was Chairman of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, appeared powerful enough to prevent a corporation concept from actuality. Sen. Gale McGee (Dem., Wyoming), Dulski's counterpart in the Senate, was also opposed to a postal corporation. Both of these Congressmen were working very closely with representatives of the postal unions, particularly the NALC.

This was the state of affairs in 1969. The postal unions had enough support on Capitol Hill to prevent the enactment of any postal corporation bill. President Nixon's

veto of any postal employee pay increase would undoubtedly not be overridden. Meanwhile, postal employees, growing increasingly impatient with the stalemate in Washington, began to take matters into their own hands. The actions of postal clerks and letter carriers in New York City post offices during the summer of 1969 were the first steps taken in what would ultimately culminate on March 18, 1970, with the first postal strike in American history.

Summary

The broad overview of the legislative battles and bureaucratic infighting which shaped the United States postal service necessarily leaves out the critical details of how, in Goffman's phrase, the workers actually "work the system." Even this brief history indicates that the worker's formal organization in the postal service was extremely weak due to the craft divisiveness of the postal unions and the relatively greater strength of the civil service bureaucracy of postal managers. The latter were, throughout most of the history of the service, supported in their hegemony over the workers by the ideologies of small town America. Congressional leaders who supported a system of patronage promotion in the postal service, which managed to survive even direct attack on the spoils system, also played a determining role in maintaining the dominance of the managers in the organization of postal work.

In response to the situation of management hegemony and weak, divided union representation, postal workers developed a system of informal organization on the job and in their leisure hours. This informal organization became highly elaborated in the period from 1930-70. In order to protect themselves on the job and to participate in the larger system of patronage and promotion, postal workers developed a full range of ethnic associations with their own links to local political institutions. On the job the postal workers developed extremely elaborate systems for avoiding the pervasive influence of the postal inspectors, and by so doing they developed the informal organizational system which would become so important when their mood turned more militant in the 1960s. Before this aspect of the postal workers' story can be fully understood, additional background on the growth of the labor force in the postal service must be examined.

Chapter II

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN AN URBAN SETTING

The national work force

In 1969, the Post Office Department employed 739,000 people. This was approximately 1 percent of the total American work force. Only the military was a larger federal employer, while among private enterprise, only AT&T was comparable. The Post Office Department's annual revenue of more than six billion dollars exceeded that of such industrial giants as U.S. Steel, Texaco and IBM.

Postal employees handled eighty-two billion pieces of mail at 44,000 facilities. 18,000 of these were small offices referred to as third or fourth-class post offices. These small offices, along with 2,100 contractor-operated facilities and 30,000 rural routes, provided service to rural America. Twelve million families were given rural box delivery by rural or contract carriers. The facilities served another four million families.

The postal work force consisted of 200,000 letter carriers, 350,000 clerks, 45,000 mailhandlers, 30,000 maintenance employees, 15,000 motor vehicle operators, 5,000

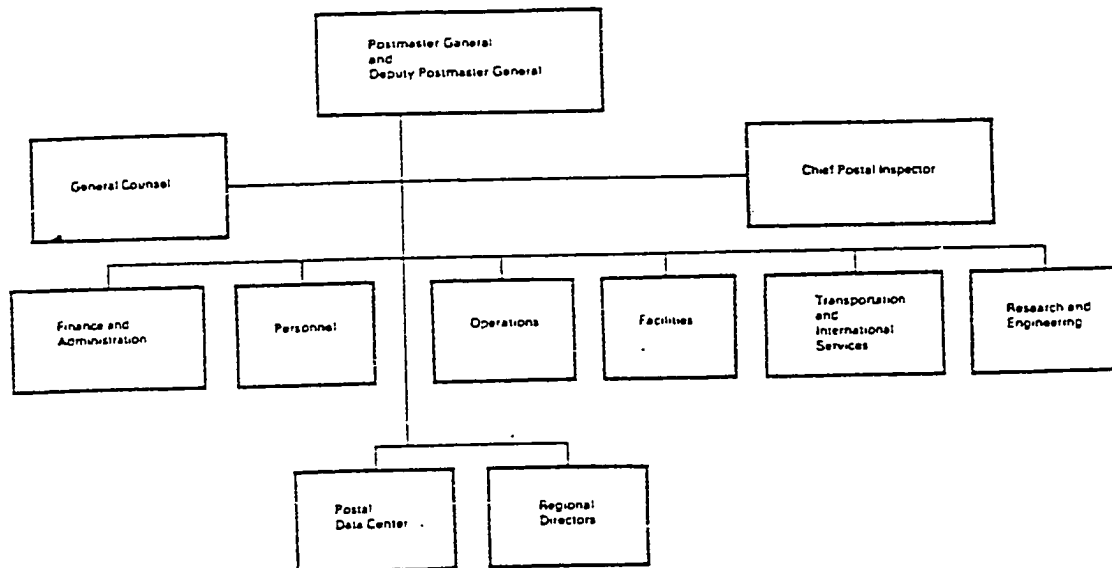
special delivery messengers, 30,000 rural letter carriers, 35,000 supervisors and 30,000 postmasters.

Managerial control was rigid and authoritarian, concentrated among a few Washington administrators. The Postmaster General, a presidential appointee, presided over a staff consisting of six Assistant Postmaster Generals, each one overseeing a particular bureau. These bureaus included: Finance and Administration, Personnel, Operations, Facilities, Transportation and International Services; and Research and Engineering. The dominant bureau, Operations, responsible for mail processing, controlled 80 percent of the total budget and had the authority to review and approve all significant decisions of the other offices. The headquarters staff had functional counterparts in each of the country's fifteen regional offices.

Communications were vertical and one-way--downward. Directives and regulations emanated from headquarters and were contained in two primary publications, the Postal Bulletin and the Postal Manual. Planning was virtually impossible because Congress never granted long-term appropriations. Management of the mails was therefore a day-to-day affair. Politics played an important role in the appointment of many postal employees. Postmasters, supervisors, regional administrators and even rural carriers were appointed only after a political recommendation. Rural carriers, however, also had to pass a civil service examination.

For the majority of postal workers, namely clerks, city carriers, mail handlers, maintenance and motor vehicle operators assigned to first-class offices, appointment was based on a civil service examination score.

Figure 1. Post Office Department, 1968



SOURCE: Nicole Woolsey Biggart, "The Creative-Destructive Process of Organizational Change: The Case of the Post Office," Administrative Science Quarterly 22 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Graduate School of Business & Public Administration, Sept. 77): 412.

Union recognition

The Post Office Department was the most organized sector of the federal government. Approximately 87 percent of the total work force was represented by exclusive bargaining units. These units were structured to a large degree as were the employee organizations, along craft lines. Recog-

nition was accorded on a national, regional and local basis. This created a situation wherein organizations with a small membership, such as the Special Delivery Messengers and the Motor Vehicle Operators enjoyed national recognition, while large independent organizations, such as the National Postal Union with sixty thousand members and the National Alliance with forty thousand members could only attain exclusive rights at the local level. The structure of union recognition also created a situation whereby an employee could be represented by a different union at the local, regional, and national level.

To obtain exclusive local recognition, an employee organization had to win a series of elections, each one on a craft basis. The National Alliance, a racially motivated group, had obtained local recognition by organizing blacks in some of the larger cities, with the majority of their members in the Washington, D.C. area, the only place where they represented letter carriers. The National Postal Union had approximately half of its membership in New York City. Members of these two independents were primarily from the clerk craft, followed by the mail handlers, motor vehicle operators and maintenance employees. Letter carriers were not represented by these independents (except in Washington, D.C.) anywhere in the U.S.A. on a craft basis, however, many individual carriers held membership in these associations.

Formal negotiations

Negotiations at the national level involved the Post Office Department and the seven craft unions with exclusive national recognition. The unions would negotiate jointly on issues affecting all employees. Supplemental agreements were then negotiated with the individual craft organizations. Local negotiations were designed to implement the National Agreement by adapting it to local working conditions. Approximately twenty-five thousand local units were in existence. The National Agreement which went into effect on March 9, 1968 was to expire on March 8, 1970.

The structure of negotiations was heavily weighted in management's favor, particularly at the local level where provisions could not include any item not approved in the National Agreement. The contract would also have to conform to existing laws and postal regulations. Issues which could not be agreed upon at the local level were referred to the regional level where regional postal and union representatives would attempt to reach agreement. If no agreement was reached at the regional level the items were forwarded to Washington for consideration by national postal and union representatives. Issues which were not agreed upon by the date the National Agreement went into effect were merely dropped with the existing condition carried over until the next negotiations.

Grievances and arbitration:
an underdeveloped system
of industrial justice

A provision dealing with advisory arbitration and optional mediation existed but was rarely utilized, primarily because of its overwhelming bias in favor of postal management. The procedure outlined in Article XI of the National Agreement allowed the use of arbitration and mediation when conflict arose concerning the interpretation and/or application of the Agreement. However, before an issue could be arbitrated, the consent of the Post Office Department was required. Even if this consent was obtained, the arbitration was merely "advisory," i.e., subject to the approval of the Post Office Department. If a mediator was utilized to move the parties toward agreement during negotiations, but was unsuccessful, he could make recommendations. These recommendations could only be made to the Postmaster General, although the unions paid half the cost for the mediator's services.

During the life of the Agreement, regularly scheduled consultation meetings were held between postal management and the employee organizations at each level where the unions held exclusive recognition. At times these meetings led to modifications of the Agreement, but final determination was entirely at the discretion of postal management.

Grievance appeals for both employee complaints and discipline cases evolved through a process of complicated cor-

respondence and meetings to a final determination by either the Civil Service Commission or the Post Office Department's Board of Appeals and Review. While discipline cases could be brought to either panel, grievance complaints were only heard by the Department's Board of Appeals and Review. Under these procedures, postal management's position was upheld in 90 percent of the cases heard. The unions realized they had little chance of success at the final step of appeal and made every effort to resolve the cases at the lowest possible step of the procedure.

Ethnic associations and
political clubs: effective
channels for worker mobility
and conflict resolution

The highly bureaucratized postal management was unwilling to render any decision involving contract interpretation at any level except the Board of Appeals and Review. Discipline cases were often resolved at lower levels because they did not impact beyond the individual employee-supervisor relationship. Another reason discipline cases were often resolved early in the process was the highly politicized postal environment. A common method of resolving the adverse action was through the intervention of a politically influential person. This was usually obtained through a regular political club or one of the politically active associations of postal employees. These included: Colum-

bians, Jewish Postal Workers, Emerald Society, Veterans Association, and Alliance. Membership in these organizations was, with the exception of the Veterans, along ethnic or racial lines. The Alliance consisted of blacks, the Emerald Society of Irish, and the Columbians of Italians. Members ranged from entry level employees to upper management officials, a structure that enhanced the association's political clout within the Post Office Department. It was not unusual for an employee to resolve a disciplinary action through these informal associations. Often the "price" involved in the process was no more than a donation to the club. This could be accomplished by purchasing a number of tickets to one of the group's social affairs, by selling or buying a large amount of raffle books, or by "volunteering" to do some work for the club. While the unions held influence at the national level, the ethnic associations were usually more effective locally. In Washington, the unions' power was based not so much on negotiating ability but on political influence exercised through a large financial investment in lobbying. The local associations' strength was in their socio-political connections.

The national unions able to negotiate only a "basic working agreement" were perceived by the majority of postal employees as rather ineffective. In the major areas of employee concern, namely wages, retirement, medical bene-

fits, promotion, and daily working conditions, the national unions directly provided only a portion of employee medical benefits. Wages and retirement benefits were in the hands of Congress; daily working conditions were outlined by the national unions but, in fact, were determined locally, and promotions were political. The ethnic associations, closely aligned with local political clubs, were usually more effective than the unions when it came to promotions and commonplace "arrangements." These arrangements might include: transfers, work shifts, special assignments, temporary hires, change of work days, and the resolution of adverse action disputes, particularly discipline cases.

Discipline cases not resolved at the local level were forwarded to the regional and then the national level where the success ratio for the unions was less than 10 percent. The one case in ten that was favorably resolved by the union took more than one year on the average to reach final determination. This time factor often reduced any positive impact a favorable decision might have on the local membership. The feeling among postal employees was largely "if you don't win your case locally, you either lose it nationally or suffer so long while waiting for a favorable decision, that you 'lose' anyway."

In 1969, a large number of postal employees perceived the ethnic associations and local political clubs, rather than the postal unions, as providing the greater opportunity

for promotion and protection within the postal service. One arm of the postal service, however, operated beyond the influence of ethnic associations, local political clubs and all but perhaps the highest level of management authority. This extremely rigid, authoritarian bureau known as the Postal Inspection Service loomed all powerful within the postal environment.

Postal Inspection Service

The Postal Inspection Service (PIS) is the oldest law enforcement agency in America. Its roots can be traced back to the first postal inspector who was also the first Postmaster General, Benjamin Franklin. The investigative expertise of the PIS has been utilized to start similar units in the Internal Revenue Service, the U.S. Department of State, and the Civil Aeronautics Board. Postal inspectors have literally reigned supreme as authority figures within the massive postal bureaucracy. A postal inspector, upon entrance into a postal facility could assume command of that installation if he deemed it necessary, "for the good of/or protection of the service." The PIS has been credited with the highest rate of cases solved, convictions obtained, and reimbursements made, for any investigative or law enforcement agency. In the area of employee discipline, cases involving postal inspectors were not subject to normal procedures and thereby, almost entirely removed local management and the unions from effective participation in the

case.

Throughout its history, the PIS has been a highly politicized impediment to good labor-management relations. Prior to 1969, the Post Office Department was obligated to employ an equal number of inspectors from each of the major political parties. The political nature of the PIS has been described by a number of writers. In his book, The United States Postal Service, Gerald Cullinan reports on the situation as it existed in 1888. Cullinan writes:

Complaints were widespread that the highly political Inspection Service was making a determined effort to harass Democratic postal employees. In some areas, inspectors used every ruse imaginable to catch postal employees in real or imagined misconduct or inefficiency so that they could effect their dismissal from the service and thus create openings for Republicans.

By 1893, despite civil service, only 2 of the employees of the Baltimore post office were Democrats, and Baltimore was a predominantly Democratic city.¹

Reacting to the almost constant surveillance of postal inspectors, the National Association of Letter Carriers in 1891, advocated the abolition of the PIS. Another purge of Democratic postal workers was launched in 1903, after letter carriers in San Francisco actively campaigned for the defeat of Republican Rep. Eugene F. Loud. Loud, Chairman of the House Post Office Committee had tried to reduce the annual \$903 salary of letter carriers. The investigation to uncover anyone who had even voted against Loud, who was defeated by a Democrat, was headed by a postal inspector who

¹Cullinan, The United States Postal Service, p. 106.

also was Loud's son-in-law. One victim of this purge was James C. Keller, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, who had actively campaigned for Loud's defeat. Keller was fired at the direction of the head of the PIS who was also in charge of city delivery.

By 1911, the drive to crush all vestiges of trade unionism in the postal service was in full swing. The following is an account of that period:

Men were fired right and left simply because they refused to give up their union membership. Inspectors were accused of spending more time checking upon the unions than they spent in preventing or detecting mail depredations.¹

Attempts to achieve a progressive concept of labor-management relations in the postal service during the early 1920s was thwarted by the PIS which viewed any attempt to involve employee organizations in discussions concerning postal policies as detrimental to its operations. William Doherty comments on the tendency of the PIS to resist change and preserve the status quo:

It is generally conceded that inspectors are brain-washed as systematically as are the members of the secret police of totalitarian nations. They savagely resist change or any attempts by the postal administration to delegate authority to anyone who is not an inspector, because every time this is done the stranglehold of the inspectors on the postal service is a little weakened.²

According to Doherty, the influence of the PIS over postal

¹Doherty, Mailman, U.S.A., p. 53.

²Ibid., p. 247.

operations grew strongest during the Eisenhower Administrations of the 1950s when Arthur E. Summerfield, Chairman of the Republican National Committee and Eisenhower's campaign manager, held the position of Postmaster General. During this period the Post Office Department instituted a program of decentralization. Because the ratio of Democratic to Republican inspectors had fallen to 80-20 percent under the previous Administration, the Republicans immediately rectified this imbalance. Most of the top administrative positions in each of the postal regions went to members of the Inspection Service. The result of decentralization has been a regional and rigid domination of employee and labor relations in the postal service. Although members of the PIS were promoted from the ranks of career postal employees, the Inspection Service was not representative of the postal work force. Of the more than two thousand members of the PIS in 1969, only nine were black. College graduates accounted for 1 percent of all postal inspectors and women were not even considered for the position. The PIS is without a doubt the most feared bureau in the postal authority structure. Among postal employees the prevailing feeling is that the Inspection Service is more inquisitorial than beneficial.

The work environment
in an urban setting

The small town post office staffed by a handful of

clerks who sorted mail and sold stamps while a half dozen letter carriers delivered the mail to homes and businesses in a single town was the image which dominated America's concept of the postal service. By 1970, that image rooted in rural tradition, described only a portion of the postal operation. The majority of postal employees worked in America's largest cities--an industrial workforce under rigid bureaucratic rule.

The NYC. post office

In New York City, 12,000 letter carriers and 30,000 clerks were employed by the Post Office Department. The majority of these postal employees, 5,000 letter carriers and 20,000 clerks, worked in the borough of Manhattan. More than one third of these workers were in the General Post Office, on Thirty-third Street and Eighth Avenue.

The forty-five postal stations in Manhattan operated seven days a week and twenty-four hours a day. There were three major shifts for employees. Tour I, the morning shift, was from midnight to 8:30 A.M. Tour II, the day shift, ran from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., and Tour III, the night shift, began at 4:00 P.M. and concluded at 12:30 A.M. In the larger postal facilities such as the General Post Office and Grand Central Station work shifts commenced at almost every hour of the day.

Most letter carriers worked the day shift with a starting time between 6:00 A.M. and 8:00 A.M. Clerks were

distributed on all shifts with an almost equal amount on the day and midnight tour, and the largest number on Tour III, the night shift.

Mail sorting and distribution

Clerks' primary responsibility was to sort mail for delivery. This involved separating the mail for cancellation, i.e., stamping the receiving date on the envelope or parcel while rendering the postage stamps ineligible for re-use by marking them with ink lines. This was accomplished by running the mail through a cancelling machine. Before letters could be run through this machine they had to be separated by size. Parcels and thick envelopes were not able to pass through the machine and were instead cancelled by hand. Mail at this stage of processing was also separated by class. Air mail was removed from ordinary mail so it could be properly expedited.

Following this initial separation and cancellation, mail would be further processed by clerks who would sort the mail according to its destination. This primary distribution, as it was termed, effected a separation of the mail by state. Mail for foreign destinations was removed at this stage and processed elsewhere. Another primary separation involved zoned and unzoned mail for the host city. Local mail having zone numbers (zip codes) was separated from local mail with no zip code (zone number) in-

licated. Zone numbers or zip codes identify the particular post office which services the addressee appearing on the piece of mail to be delivered.

The next step in the mail sorting process, termed the secondary distribution, was one in which the mail was separated according to cities and zip codes (zone numbers) within the cities. Up to this point very little skill was needed to process mail. However, in order to have unzoned mail sent to the appropriate post office for delivery, the postal clerk had to be able to forward mail to the correct post office without that post office being indicated on the letter. The clerk could do this because he was able to recognize the post office of the letter's destination from the addressee's street name and number, or by the town, village, or city indicated on the particular piece of mail. This skill was attained by constant study and practice.

Craft classifications and responsibilities

Clerks were assigned a "sorting scheme" on which they were periodically tested. A "scheme" could include thousands of possible distributions, i.e., addresses without the final destination (post office) for delivery indicated on the piece of mail. A clerk who failed to maintain a 95 percent accuracy rate for mail distribution on his scheme test could be discharged. More likely, he would, after three scheme test failures, be given an opportunity to re-

main a postal employee but in a lesser paid classification --usually mailhandler.

Mailhandlers did not have to qualify on sorting scheme examinations, nor were they required to have a valid driver's license or pass the postal driving test as did letter carriers, nor did they interact with the public. Subsequently, they were paid less money and had fewer promotional opportunities. Mailhandlers performed most of the heavier lifting and loading work for the Post Office Department.

Letter carriers received the same rate of pay and benefits as postal clerks. In New York City letter carriers were divided into the following functional classifications: first-class delivery, parcel post, special delivery, collections, case routers, and night routers. Before describing these sub-divisions of letter carriers, it is important to note one of the primary differentials in postal job classifications, i.e., the distinction between "regular" and "substitute" employees.

Regular and substitute employment

An individual when first hired, after qualifying on a civil service examination, for a career position with the Post Office Department was appointed to substitute status. A person could remain a substitute indefinitely because reclassification to regular status was dependent upon vacan-

cies occurring in the regular ranks. While the duration individuals have spent as a substitute postal employee have ranged from nine months to twelve years, the average term of substitution in the New York City post office in the 1960s was two years.

In the Post Office Department the transition from substitute to regular is considered an upgrading though technically both positions are rated at the same GR or grade level. Regulars enjoy benefits not available to substitute employees. Regulars could "bid" for assignments, i.e., work shifts (tours), days off, vacations, and specific tasks including sorting schemes for clerks and delivery routes for carriers. These bids were specific requests for particular assignments which the individual could request when an opening (vacancy) existed in any of these areas. Seniority was the criteria utilized in determining whether or not an employee's bid was successful. Bids were confined to the particular craft. Letter carriers could not bid for positions in the clerk craft (sorting schemes, office jobs) nor could clerks bid for positions involving mail delivery. This craft distinction applied to each of the postal job categories.

Regulars enjoyed other benefits not available to substitutes, including paid holidays, and time and one-half for overtime--subs did not receive time and one-half pay for overtime until 1966. Even then it was for hours worked

beyond forty per week, while for regulars it continued to be for work beyond eight hours a day. A regular employee worked a fixed tour of duty and was guaranteed forty hours pay each week. Substitutes had flexible work schedules with no guarantee of hours beyond two--if called in to work.

In spite of these obvious advantages of regular over substitute status many people preferred to defer the upgrading. As a substitute an employee received a slightly higher hourly rate of pay. The Post Office Department justified this disparity by computing the eight holidays regulars received pay for and adding this sixty-four hour total to the substitute's hourly rate over a one year period. Therefore, the upgrading from sub to regular status cost the Post Office Department no money because individuals promoted to regular were paid eight cents less per hour than they had received as substitutes. Subs, because they were paid at the same hourly rate regardless of how many hours they worked, usually had larger paychecks than regular employees. They were, however, working sixty and seventy hour weeks. While many subs preferred the extra hours, others did not. There was no choice in the matter, management could impose a twelve-hour day and a seven-day week upon employees whenever they deemed it necessary "for the good of the service."

Another reason an individual might prefer to remain in a substitute status was the usual procedure of being trans-

ferred upon becoming a regular. A postal employee, after serving as a substitute for a substantial period of time, was likely to have become accustomed to the work location, tasks, and social relationships with other employees. It was even possible that the substitute had acquired a relatively consistent and desired tour of duty. Upon promotion to regular all of these conditions were likely to change.

Routemen and floaters

Most letter carriers in New York City worked in a first-class delivery section of a post office. Regulars and substitutes could be assigned to the first-class section. Regulars were classified as: "routemen" or "floaters." A routeman was a regular with a permanently assigned daily delivery sequence which had been obtained through the bidding system. Floaters were regular letter carriers with no permanent route assignment and, therefore, placed wherever supervision determined they were needed. Often a floater would be assigned to more than one route on any given day. Floaters were expected to learn how to sort and deliver mail for up to five routes.

The assignment of work to floaters varied. In some post offices floaters could bid for a cycle of routes to assist the regular carriers on. The senior floater bidding for such an assignment would then work only on those routes

requiring assistance in the cycle. Usually a "cycle floater" would work on a different route each day of the week, filling in on the regular routeman's day off.

In post offices where the informal method of assigning work to floaters was in effect, the process was more complicated. While technically a supervisor could assign a floater to a particular route, this was never done (except for brief temporary emergent situations) without the approval of the route's permanently assigned carriers. While the regular routemen had no formal right to select floaters, they exercised a strong informal control that was rarely challenged by management. A supervisor might temporarily assign a floater to a particular route, but the final decision on whether or not the floater would remain or even return was made by the regular routemen. Often the assignment of a floater to a route was initiated by the regular routemen who would approach the supervisor and request that a particular floater be placed on their route on a regular basis. These requests were usually honored.

The floater was not entirely powerless in the assignment process. The best way a floater could earn a recommendation from regular routemen was by developing a reputation as a "dependable" worker. Dependable to the regular routemen meant a floater who could be counted on to fill-in when needed during the routemen's vacations and days off. Dependable also meant someone who could be trusted to work

within the specific pace set by the routemen and who would not divulge the amount of time the routemen spent on rest breaks once they left the post office for delivery duties. The floater would also have to be someone the routemen could trust not to disclose the location for these rest breaks and who would not keep any gratuities from patrons for himself instead of the routemen. Competence was, of course, an important attribute for a floater, but even more important was his dependability or ability to get along with the routemen within the confines of an established system of mail delivery and customer relationships. A floater who antagonized patrons would not be tolerated for long by the regular routemen.

A floater could also exercise some control of the assignment process through negative behavior. If assigned to a route which he did not prefer the floater could perform less than satisfactorily and therefore not be acceptable to the regular routemen. A floater was somewhat restrained in this behavior because if he did not gain acceptance on any route, he could ruin his reputation and was likely to be assigned to the least desirable carrier tasks, including collections.

Collecting the mail

"Collections" is that part of the postal service which picks up or collects mail from public mail boxes and deliv-

ers it to the postal facility for processing and eventual distribution. Public mail boxes (depositories) are found in a variety of locations. They may be on public sidewalks, usually at busy intersections, in office buildings, hospitals and hotels, or on posts--in what is usually a lightly trafficked area which is either a considerable distance from other mail depositories or convenient for a specific public--a church, for example. Collections may be performed on foot or from a postal vehicle. There is a rigid time schedule which must be followed. Any deviation in collection, either earlier or later than the time indicated on the mail depository, could lead to disciplinary action being taken against the collector. If a depository was "flagged," i.e., missed completely by the collector, discipline was assured. The discipline was usually a warning or suspension for a first offense and a suspension or discharge for a second flagging offense.

The collector's task is the most surveilled of all the letter carrier functions. Test letters are continuously placed in depositories and checked to see if they are collected on schedule. Supervisors often station themselves near a mail depository to check on the collector's adherence to schedule, and where indicated on the mailbox, to discover if the collector is properly "segregating the mail." Segregating the mail means separating it into mailbags according to the special indications on the mail depositories.

Some boxes indicate air mail and special delivery only. Others may say local or out-of-town. Failure to properly segregate the mail is an offense for which the carrier may be disciplined. The job of collector is physically and mentally grueling. A collector has very little free time and almost no contact with other carriers during his tour of duty. There were some regulars who had permanently assigned collections but most collections in New York City were performed by floaters and substitutes.

Parcel post

Parcel post was another category of letter carriers. Parcel post is also a package as opposed to a letter and more specifically is a mailing rate. Mailing rates for parcel post are cheaper per ounce than first-class mail and for that reason parcel post is processed slower and takes longer to be delivered. Packages can be mailed "first-class," i.e., paid for at the first-class rate. A package mailed first-class should be delivered as expeditiously as a first-class letter. It will certainly be delivered before packages mailed with a parcel post rate. In New York City most parcel post was delivered by regulars. Very few floaters were assigned to a parcel post section because all parcel post carriers worked a Monday-Friday work schedule. When a parcel post route had an exceptionally heavy volume of mail and required assistance, substitutes were assigned

to aid with delivery. This did not occur often because parcel post mail not delivered one day could be delivered the next. The requirement of immediate delivery which applied to first-class mail did not apply to parcel post. In residential areas parcel post was delivered by a single carrier with a mail truck. In business areas parcel post routes consisted of two to four carriers. Exceptionally heavy routes such as existed in mid-Manhattan's garment district had teams of carriers working from large trucks or trailers stationed outside the building where most of the post would be delivered. A parcel post carrier's route would encompass a number of first-class carrier routes and a working relationship usually developed between parcel post and first-class carriers. In addition to delivering packages, a parcel post carrier would often deposit the first-class carriers' overflow bags of mail in the appropriate relay boxes along the route. The first-class carrier could only fit a portion of his delivery load on his shoulder or in his cart, the remaining mail had to be worked from these relay boxes. In some post offices the parcel post carriers also transported the first-class carriers to their routes.

Parcel post carriers were usually high on the seniority list. Carriers preferred parcel post for the following reasons: a Monday-Friday work week; a later starting time-- 7:30 A.M. instead of 6:00 A.M.; less supervision, i.e., a parcel post carrier left the post office in the morning and

did not return until near quitting time in late afternoon.

Case routers and night routers

Case routers and night routers were two classifications of letter carriers with similar functions. Both consisted of regular carriers who worked during the night preparing mail for the first-class carriers to deliver. Those carriers that worked from 10:00 P.M. to 6:30 A.M. were known as case routers. Those that worked from 1:00 to 9:30 A.M. were known as night routers. Night routers in addition to preparing the mail for delivery, also assisted business routes with the first of the three daily delivery trips. Night routers were usually regulars without enough seniority to obtain a first-class or parcel post assignment (route) and preferred the morning tour to "floating." Sometimes the morning tour was preferred for personal reasons such as going to school or working another job. Many of these were temporary situations, so there was a high turnover rate on these tours. Case routers were almost exclusively carriers who could not perform the functions of delivery or collections due to illness or injury. Those carriers temporarily assigned as case routers were classified "light duty" carriers.

Special delivery

Special delivery carriers were unique to the Manhattan and Bronx boroughs of New York City. Everywhere else indiv-

iduals who delivered special delivery mail were classified special delivery messengers. These "messengers" received a lower rate of pay than clerks and carriers and were represented by their own union--the Special Delivery Messengers Association.

In Manhattan and the Bronx more than three hundred carriers were assigned to deliver special delivery mail. Approximately two-thirds of these carriers were substitutes, the rest were regulars. Special delivery carriers delivered only special delivery mail, parcels and letters, by foot and/or vehicle (truck or station wagon) between the hours of 7:00 A.M. and 11:00 P.M., seven days a week.

Work in the special delivery units was distributed by regular clerks under the supervision of a foreman. This supervisor rarely became involved in the actual distribution of the work, leaving the clerks pretty much in charge. Regular carriers in the unit worked either a 7:00 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. or 3:30 to 12:00 P.M. shift. Regular special delivery carriers delivered mail along a steady or consistent route. The substitutes delivered almost all of the heavy packages and performed most of the driving assignments requiring a truck. Regulars who did drive to deliver their routes used station wagons. While the regulars were guaranteed eight hours of work each day, the substitutes were not. When there was not enough work for a substitute in the special delivery unit he would either be sent home or

assigned to another section in the postal facility. Work in these other units was generally less desirable than work in the special delivery section.

Special delivery mail was continuously processed for delivery. The regular carriers were given only enough mail each delivery trip to assure their return within two hours. Thus each regular made four complete delivery trips each day. Substitutes delivering special delivery letters were also given approximately two hours work at a time, while those delivering packages might be allocated as much as four hours worth of work. It was not uncommon for two substitutes to be sent out together on a truck filled with special delivery parcels. The routes of special delivery carriers encompassed a number of first-class and parcel post routes. Unlike any other delivery route, special delivery carriers were not confined to the geographical boundaries of one post office or zone number (zip code). Special delivery carriers stationed at the General Post Office in Manhattan, delivered to an area covered by six post offices. This unique characteristic of special delivery carrier functions will be examined further in subsequent chapters.

Summary

The autocratic organizational structure, rigid control system, craft distinctions and elaborate internal labor mar-

ket segmentation all served to inhibit the development of worker solidarity among postal employees. Letter carriers, at least the regular routemen, perceived themselves as independent entrepreneurs. They were segregated by job function, classification, shift work and their own status distinctions. The inside workers were also separated by craft and classification. Clerks were considered more skilled and were paid higher than mailhandlers and maintenance workers and just as the clerks felt superior to these lower graded classifications so did the mailhandlers perceive themselves vis-a-vis the maintenance workers. It was only in association with the ethnic organizations and local political clubs that the status distinctions of the workplace diminished in importance. The unions, segregated by craft, were able to overcome only a minimal degree of divisiveness within a particular craft, while perpetuating the lack of solidarity among the various crafts. Although a large percentage of postal workers were union members, the unions were not considered as capable as the ethnic associations and political clubs for promotion, protection and favor.

Yet, despite all of these barriers to militant collective action, the postal workers would rise up in defiance of this rigid bureaucratic control. Another step toward understanding how this ultimately occurred requires an examination of the networks of social interaction involving postal workers.

CHAPTER III

OCCUPATIONAL COMMUNITY

The division of labor in the post office directly affects the socialization patterns of postal employees. This is especially true in big cities where much of the work force is employed on other than day shifts. In addition to working nights, many postal employees also work on weekends. These irregular patterns of employment conditions make it difficult for postal employees to socialize with people working regular hours. Therefore, much of the socialization postal employees engage in is with other postal employees. This is particularly the case for clerks working the evening shift, Tour III.

"Casing mail"

Tour III usually begins at 4:00 P.M. and concludes at 12:30 A.M. Most of the clerks' time was spent sorting mail. To sort mail a clerk would sit on a stool facing a case which contained about thirty-five holes, each a space for a particular designation. Clerks would hold as much mail as possible in one hand and place the mail in the appropriate space on the case with the other. Clerks referred to this process as "boxing-up" or "casing" mail. Clerks were under

constant supervision. Their hand had to be moving at all times and their eyes had to face the case. A supervisor was assigned to each aisle of clerks on a ratio of approximately one supervisor for every sixteen clerks. The clerks were allowed very little movement. The mail they sorted was brought to them by a mailhandler, the supervisor or an automatic assembly belt (rollers positioned under each case). If a clerk wanted to leave the case for any reason, he had to receive permission from the supervisor. Permission was not always granted especially if more than one other clerk was away from his case. A clerk could only leave the case for two reasons, to use the bathroom or make a phone call. To make a phone call a clerk had to have an authorized pass signed by the foreman. When a clerk did receive permission to leave the case, the time he was gone was carefully monitored. It was not uncommon for supervisors to "raid" the bathrooms in attempts to catch clerks "loitering." The confining nature of the clerk's mail-sorting function limited his work-time relationships to conversations with the individual on his immediate left or right, providing the supervisor allowed this "diversion," which was not always so. Postal clerks free time (off-the-clock) during their tour of duty was limited to a ten minute break between starting time and lunch, and a thirty minute lunch period. Most clerks spent this free time in the "swing room."

The "swing room"

The "swing room" was a specially designated section of the post office, away from the work area, which contained tables, chairs and sometimes vending machines. All non-management personnel availed themselves of the swing room every day. The swing room was utilized for coffee and lunch breaks as well as for the time spent waiting for one's tour of duty to begin. For most postal employees time spent in the swing room prior to the start of one's tour of duty was of a relatively short duration--almost always less than half an hour. For a large number of clerks on the evening shift, time spent in the swing room was quite significant, two to three hours each day before starting work. Groups of clerks with a starting time of 4:00 P.M. would arrive in the swing room between 1:00 and 2:00 P.M. Almost all of them would be participants in a daily card game, most often "rummy." Among the black postal workers the card game played was usually "whist." Although there was an almost equal number of black and white workers on Tour III at the General Post Office in Manhattan, only one group of blacks followed this daily pattern of card playing before work. The white groups which numbered four or five each day all began playing well before 3:00 P.M., while the blacks usually started at 3:00 P.M. None of the groups was racially integrated and all of the players were regulars, no substitutes participated.

In addition to the "card players," a number of other clerks on Tour III made use of the swing room for an hour or more before their tour began each day. Many of these early arrivals at the post office congregated around horse racing sheets. Discussion was centered on analyzing jockeys, horses and race tracks for the purpose of selecting a winning combination. Other clerks discussed sports and a few talked about movies. Gambling seemed to be the major motivation for these early arrivals. Wagers were placed on every conceivable sport and lottery-type numbers every day in the swing room with the height of activity between 1:00 and 4:00 P.M.

Shift work and socialization patterns of clerks

The clerks on Tour III seemed to socialize as a group more than any other in the post office. The taverns surrounding the General Post Office had large numbers of Tour III clerks as regular customers after their shift ended at 12:30 A.M. Some clerks regularly went to early afternoon movies together. Others would go to the all night theatres on Forty-second Street after finishing work.

Clerks working Tour I, the midnight or morning tour (12:00 P.M. - 8:30 A.M.), also utilized the swing room for long periods of time before their work shift began. Because there were less clerks on Tour I than there were on Tour III, the actual number of early arrivals was less. The

types of activities, however, were quite similar. Gambling predominated. Horse players, sports bettors and card players comprised the Tour I early arrivals. Even the card games mirrored those of Tour III. Whist and rummy were the favorites of the black and white players respectively. As on the previous tour, the games were not integrated and no substitutes participated. It should be noted that there were few subs on the midnight tour and that blacks constituted a majority of the Tour I work force. This was reflected in the make-up of the steady card game participants, two of the three games were whist, and the players were black.

Tour I workers had a one hour "lunch break" while all other tours' lunch periods were only thirty minutes. During this hour usually 4:00-5:00 A.M., the card games resumed. Unlike the other tours' card games, the Tour I playing continued past the ending of the shift. The games would commence at 9:00 A.M. and last until postal management interrupted them. This was most often at about 10:00 A.M. The post office did not object to people on the premises before their tour of duty began, but they discouraged people from hanging around after their tour, especially during the day shift when upper level management officials were likely to be around.

Very few Tour I workers socialized off the job. A small group who did, met each evening in a tavern near the

post office. Although as many as a dozen or more Tour I clerks would stop in the tavern before work, most arrived between 11:00 and 11:30 P.M. Those two or three clerks who gathered there every evening for two or more hours were individuals considered to have "a drinking problem." Tour I employees did not have as many opportunities for social interaction when their work shifts ended as did those on Tour II and III. While it is true Tour I employees did have prime social time available before starting work in the evenings, this was time likely to be spent at home with families and not involved in activities that could fatigue them or otherwise inhibit their work abilities.

Clerks on the day shift

Clerks on Tour II, the day shift, were "normal" in their socialization patterns. Most would arrive within the one-half hour preceding their tour of duty. At lunch break a few card games would begin. These were two-player games usually rummy or casino. There were few blacks on the day shift, hardly enough for a whist game. Many clerks left the post office during lunch break to eat in any one of the many restaurants surrounding the General Post Office. Clerks who remained in the swing room during lunch time read the newspapers or a book, discussed sports, played checkers or chess and placed bets with the resident bookmakers. Each tour had its own bookmakers.

Tour II clerks made use of the taverns in the neighborhood but not as frequently as did those on the other tours. While a few clerks frequented the local taverns on an almost daily basis, it was only on paydays that large numbers of Tour II clerks patronized the taverns. Some of these establishments would cash postal pay checks, an inducement which undoubtedly attracted customers from the postal work force. Tour II clerks would go to the taverns directly from work on payday and many of them would remain there until much later that night or early the next morning. Just as many, however, would leave after an hour or two.

Clerks on Tour II were older and more senior employees than those on other tours. They also knew each other longer and more personally. They often spoke of each others families from familiarity. Many had attended weddings, graduations, bar mitzvahs, and other important social affairs together. Workers' affiliations with each other covered a wide base. Some were members of the same social or political club. None of these relationships were observable to any degree among clerks on other tours.

Substitute clerks
and "schemes"

Substitute clerks did not socialize with regular clerks either on or away from the job. Most worked fifty to sixty hours spread over six days each week. They seldom

worked with regulars because they had not mastered a "scheme." Sub clerks worked the least desirable tours, the "graveyard shifts" as they were termed. The majority of subs worked evening tours beginning at five, six or seven o'clock. These tours would end between three and six o'clock in the morning. The following statement reflected the feelings of many of the sub clerks:

We have no social life. We are going to work when everybody else is coming home. If we are "lucky" we pass our family and friends on the way and maybe get to say hello. We don't get to see any of the good shows on TV. We can't play on any of the ball or bowling teams with our friends. We can't even go to a bar. They're closed when we finish work and it's too early to drink before work. I feel like the post office has taken over my whole life. I work six days a week and ten hours a day. Sometimes I don't get a day off for almost two weeks. At Christmas time, forget it. I worked twenty-three days straight. It's really too much. I'm either at the post office or getting ready to come to the post office. When I'm home I'm either sleeping or studying the gosh-damn scheme.

Substitute clerks had to pass a primary scheme test within their first ninety days of employment and a major scheme (Manhattan/Bronx) by the end of their first year. Failure to obtain a 95 percent accuracy score after three attempts would lead to discharge. In order to properly prepare for the Manhattan scheme which was broken into two parts, A & B, and consisted of approximately 850 and 650 possible separations respectively, a substitute had to practice for at least one hour every day. A sub could practice the scheme at home or at the post office where scheme study rooms were

available. A scheme study room consisted of a small scale replica of the scheme case on the workroom floor and index cards with each of the fifteen hundred possible addresses one had to memorize. These index cards were sold at the post office for two and three dollars a set. Subs studying the scheme at home would place these cards in a makeshift "case" usually fashioned from an egg crate. While the turnover rate for all postal employees was approximately 25 percent during 1965-70, it was almost 40 percent for substitute clerks in the New York City post office.

Letter carriers in the Bronx

More than 80 percent of the sixty-five hundred letter carriers employed in Manhattan and the Bronx worked on Tour II, the day shift. In the Bronx, all but a few dozen of the fifteen hundred letter carriers worked days. Those with other than a day shift were assigned to collections and/or special delivery at the Bronx General Post Office. This was the only one of the twenty-two Bronx stations which was open around the clock. No Bronx letter carriers were on Tour I. Even those carriers who were on light duty assignments worked on the day or early afternoon shift. Letter carriers in the Bronx, a predominantly residential borough, made only one delivery trip each day. Each route had only one carrier assigned to it. The Bronx letter carriers started work at 6:00 or 7:00 A.M. and finished at either

2:30 or 3:30 P.M. Because of their early starting time few carriers arrived at the post office much before their tour began. Some carriers travelled to and from work in their uniform but most changed clothes at the post office.

Bronx letter carriers began their work day preparing mail for delivery on their assigned route. By the time mail reached the letter carrier in trays or bundles it had been pre-sorted by postal clerks to such a degree that it was all mail for delivery on that particular route only. The carrier would further sort the mail into the route's actual delivery sequence separating it by street number and, where appropriate, individual or family name.

Many of the Bronx stations resembled small town post offices. A handful of clerks prepared mail for the carriers, each in turn delivering to a particular route. These post offices were open during the day hours only and were closed by 6:00 or 7:00 P.M.

After preparing his mail for delivery the letter carrier would "sign" for his "valuables." Valuables, also called "accountables," were any mail requiring payment or signature from a customer upon delivery. This included: postage due, C.O.D., registered and certified mail. The carrier would fit as much mail as possible into the bag he would carry. The remaining mail would be left in "relay bags" which would be placed in the appropriate "relay boxes" along the carrier's route by a letter carrier with a driving

assignment. This person was usually a parcel post carrier, but could be a substitute or floater if needed.

Bronx carriers would be out on the street effecting delivery each day at about 9:00 A.M. For the major part of his work day, the carrier was on his own, virtually isolated from all other postal employees. A letter carrier would be subject to discipline if he deviated from his route. All of his time outside the post office had to be spent within the geographic confines of his route. This restriction even applied to his lunch break which was thirty minutes and because of his early starting time usually before most other workers' lunch periods. The most common official lunch time for Bronx carriers was 10:30 to 11:00 or 11:00 to 11:30 A.M.

After this lunch break, the carrier would resume his delivery duties, most of which would be finished by 1:00 P.M. Upon completion of all mail delivery the carrier would return to the post office where he would account for all his valuables, turn in the mail box key and prepare all his undeliverable mail for proper forwarding. After forwarding the mail, which carriers referred to as "doing beats" or "mark-ups," a carrier would, if time remained on his tour of duty, box-up mail for his route which the clerks had sorted during the day. When a carrier's tour was over, he left the post office.

Competition and control.
Status and the role of
informal reward systems

There was very little socialization among Bronx letter carriers at the post office or during their tour of duty. The extent of interaction at the stations involved brief conversations while preparing mail for delivery at the beginning of the tour or toward the end of the day while forwarding the mail. Letter carriers were independent. They saw themselves as private entrepreneurs. Each referred to "my route" or "my customers." Carriers were in slight competition with each other. They vied first for their route; then for a dependable floater; accurate and prompt preparation of their mail by the clerks; cooperation from the drivers who placed their relay bags or drove the carriers to the starting point of their routes; and favor from the supervisors. In order to acquire an advantage or at least comfort in each of these areas, the letter carriers bestowed cash payments. The method of payment was not formal, public, nor even obvious to anyone not directly involved in it. Nor was the payment made in advance of the favor or services rendered. Rather it was presented as a gift. An annual "Christmas gratuity" donated to those individuals who throughout the course of the year had cooperated with and assisted the letter carriers in effecting prompt and dependable service to the public. The appreciative patrons had in turn rewarded the letter carrier with

more than enough "tokens of appreciation" to allow him to distribute gratuities among the other postal workers and still have a generous sufficiency left for himself. The fact that letter carriers, at least regulars with their own routes, were able to add between two hundred and two thousand dollars a year to their income added considerably to their status within the postal community. Letter carriers who bestowed gratuities on a variety of postal employees for "assisting them with their business" throughout the year, added immeasurably to their own feelings of self esteem and in many cases of superiority.

Patterns of socialization

The Bronx letter carriers did socialize to some degree after working hours. There was a very active bowling league during the winter months and a popular softball league during the spring and early summer. The bowling league was sponsored by the letter carriers union--Branch 36 of the National Association of Letter Carriers. Branch 36, headquartered in mid-Manhattan, had jurisdiction over letter carriers in Manhattan and the Bronx. It was the largest letter carrier local in the country with more than eight thousand members. This figure included retirees and associate members. Of the slightly more than six thousand letter carriers in Manhattan and the Bronx, approximately 85 percent belonged to the union. In the Bronx the member-

ship rate was over 90 percent with more than thirteen hundred of the fifteen hundred letter carriers enrolled as dues paying members of Branch 36.

The bowling and
softball leagues

The bowling league consisted of twenty teams. Eight of these were from Bronx stations while twelve represented post offices in Manhattan. The Manhattan post offices, Grand Central, FDR, Lenox Hill, GPO and Murray Hill were large stations with approximately twelve hundred letter carriers assigned to them. Many of the Bronx teams had clerks as members. The limited personnel, similar work schedules and interdependent work relationships fostered inter-craft association which functioned outside the Bronx post offices.

The softball league, also sponsored by Branch 36, consisted of eighteen teams. Twelve represented the Bronx while six played in the Manhattan division. Some of the teams were formed by carriers from two stations joining together. A large percentage of clerks played in the carrier's softball league.

The leagues were also integrated in terms of race, age and ethnicity. The bowling league had participants from every age group. Blacks constituted about 10 percent of the team members which was only slightly less than their ratio in the Bronx carrier work force. Hispanics comprised ap-

proximately 7-8 percent of the Bronx letter carriers but only 2-3 percent of the bowling league members. In the softball league almost all of the players were between twenty and thirty-five years of age. Blacks accounted for about 10 percent of the players while Hispanics accounted for at least 20 percent. Substitutes were well represented on all of the teams and many of the players were floaters.

These two activities, the bowling and softball leagues, provided a cross section of Bronx postal employees with a greater degree of opportunity to interact with each other than was available during working hours. Clerks and letter carriers, regulars and substitutes from all across the Bronx, and in the case of the bowling league, parts of Manhattan, jointly participated in these social events.

Political clubs

Bronx postal workers were quite active in political clubs and ethnic associations. The fact that so many of them lived in the borough in which they worked added to their influence in local politics. The Democratic party which dominated NYC politics was the choice of most postal workers. Clerks were especially active in the local clubs where many served as committeemen. The more active a postal employee was politically, the better his chances for a promotion became. Appointment to postal supervisor required certain formal prerequisites such as five years employment

and a passing grade on the qualifying examination but it also required a powerful informal condition--sponsorship. This sponsorship was obtained through a major political party club. It was obtained either through long and diligent service to that organization or by a recommendation from a respected and influential member of the party. The latter was accompanied by a "donation" to the club. During the 1960s in the NYC post office the appropriate donation in relation to a promotion to supervisor was fifteen hundred dollars.

Ethnic associations

Ethnic associations were active and influential in the Bronx post office. The fledgling Hispanic postal workers association had its headquarters on Longfellow Avenue, where it served members from Manhattan as well. The Irish association, the Emerald Society, was declining in membership and influence. The Jewish Postal Workers association was fairly active and quite effective. Combining its influence with the power of the Democratic clubs, the Jewish Postal Workers over the years had more of their members in the supervisory ranks than any other ethnic association. The most powerful and influential ethnic organization among Bronx postal workers during the 1960s was that of the Italo-Americans, the Columbian Association. Even the Bronx postmaster belonged to the Columbians. During the 1960s, the

Columbians placed more of their members into supervisory positions than any other postal ethnic association. The Columbians, as did the Jewish Postal Workers, worked in conjunction with the local political clubs. While the Democratic clubs still dominated, the Columbians more than any other postal ethnic association also worked closely with the Republican party leaders.

Postal clerks dominated all of the ethnic associations in the NYC post office. However, more letter carriers belonged to the Columbians than to any other of these associations. This served to further strengthen the organization. Because few letter carriers sought supervisory positions, the efforts of the association in obtaining such positions could be concentrated on clerks. Therefore, the Columbians, buoyed by the membership figures and dues contributions of letter carriers were able to exert a greater influence toward achieving their primary goal, supervisory positions for members. In this case, for clerks almost exclusively. The clerks also appreciated this letter carrier support.

Letter carriers in Manhattan

In Manhattan, the letter carriers' job duties and work shifts were much more diversified than in the Bronx. Although 80 percent of the almost six thousand carriers worked on Tour II, approximately one thousand letter carriers in

Manhattan were assigned to other than the day shift. Most of these carriers were substitutes and/or junior regulars assigned to afternoon and evening collections. A few hundred letter carriers worked the morning or midnight shift in Manhattan. These night routers or case routers were joined by carriers assigned to light duty. These Tour I carriers were stationed in the larger post offices or "terminals." A terminal was a post office which in addition to processing mail for delivery within its own geographic boundaries also served as a primary distribution center for other post offices. Terminals in Manhattan included the General Post Office, Church Street Station, FDR post office, and Grand Central. A number of other stations had midnight tours because of the large volume of mail handled each day. In fact, twenty-six of the thirty-six post offices employing letter carriers in Manhattan had a midnight tour which prepared the mail for next day delivery. In the largest post offices, the terminals, as many as seventy-five to one hundred carriers were assigned to Tour I. The overwhelming majority of letter carriers in Manhattan working other than Tour II, the day shift, were blacks and Hispanics. While the midnight tour had a wide range of age groups, Tour III, consisting almost exclusively of collectors, was undoubtedly the youngest amalgam of carriers in the N.Y.C. post office.

Social relationships
of night routers

The structure of the tours and the nature of the work responsibilities affected the socialization patterns of the Manhattan letter carriers. The midnight tours which generally consisted of temporary people, i.e., those on light duty assignments, a few substitutes, and junior regulars who would remain no more than a few months when their bid for another assignment would be successful, were not conducive to the formation of social relationships. Only those few carriers who appeared to be permanent night or case routers seemed to form any sort of social relationship at the post office. At Manhattan's GPO where seventy-four carriers were assigned to Tour I, the only social interaction that was visible on a regular basis was a daily "whist" game. Four black carriers played this card game for three hours each day. They would assemble in the swing room an hour before their tour began, resume the game during lunch hour and play for another hour at the conclusion of their tour in the morning. Night routers while preparing the mail for delivery were virtually isolated. Each "router" was usually responsible for "boxing-up" two or three routes. This meant that he might be the only person working in an entire aisle. Seldom did one find two night routers working side by side.

Collectors and
social behavior

Collectors, tied to a rigid and rigorous time schedule and working almost always alone, had little time or opportunity to socialize during working hours. The few who did interact after work either frequented a local tavern or visited with a neighborhood prostitute. The collectors who drove or walked through the area while on duty had come to know much about what was available at what risk in the neighborhood surrounding the post office. Some collectors preferred collecting to working as an unassigned floater because a regular collector had every weekend off while floaters worked most Saturdays. Only substitute carriers performed weekend collections and worked on Sundays. The collectors who opted for Saturdays off did so for social reasons. They either wanted to be able to go out on Friday night and not have to worry about getting up early to come to work on Saturday and/or they had "things to do on Saturday." Most of these things involved social activities with their own neighborhood friends, families or girlfriends, not with other collectors.

Parcel post carriers:
a highly socialized group

Parcel post carriers assigned to the larger post offices in Manhattan socialized on the job more than any other classification of letter carriers. Parcel post carriers

worked a Monday-Friday work week and usually started at 7:00 or 7:30 A.M. These conditions added to the attractiveness of a parcel post assignment. Because the regular carrier did not have a day off on a delivery day there was little need for all but a few floaters to be regularly assigned to the section. Substitutes were apportioned only when needed. This regularly occurred on Mondays when the first class delivery was light and parcel post was heaviest. The parcel post routes in the business sections of Manhattan all had between two and four carriers assigned to them. One of these carriers would begin his work day by reporting to a post office garage to pick up a truck from which the routed mail would be delivered. The carrier would proceed with the truck to the post office to which he was assigned. Upon arrival at his station the carrier would park the truck at a loading platform, change into his uniform, meet his partners and usually have time for a cup of coffee before continuing work. Sometimes the parcel post carrier to whom the truck was assigned would transport first-class carriers and their relay bags to their routes before starting work on his own route. While one parcel post carrier performed these duties his partner(s) were busy preparing the parcels for delivery. The transporting of the first-class carriers and their mail took no more than twenty to forty minutes. This time usually coincided perfectly with the time needed to have the parcels ready for loading

onto the truck. All the regular parcel post carriers had to do with the parcels at this point was locate them and push them toward the platform where the truck would park. The packages had previously been sorted by clerks and loaded onto "rolling-skids" by mailhandlers. The carriers would load the parcels into the truck, collect and sign for their valuables and leave for their route. Parcel post carriers were instructed to deliver any first-class mail packages before working on the parcel post rate mail. Parcel post carriers delivered only those first-class pieces that were too large or heavy for the first-class carrier to handle. The rule-of-thumb calculation was anything bigger than a shoe-box or weighing more than two and one-half pounds.

Most parcel post carriers left the post office at approximately the same time. Before beginning their deliveries they would stop for a coffee break. It was not uncommon to see five or six mail trucks parked outside a local eatery. Parcel post carriers were not as confined to the geographical boundaries of their route as much as first-class letter carriers were. They also had a one hour lunch period between 12:00 P.M. and 1:00 P.M., the time most freight elevators in business districts are closed to deliveries. Many of the parcel post carriers gathered at the same eatery or tavern during their lunch hour. There were two favorite spots where parcel post carriers gathered for

lunch in the GPO area. On any given day twenty to thirty carriers could be found in each of these places between 12:00 P.M. and 1:00 P.M.

Parcel post carriers all worked the same tour, had weekends off, were almost all senior regulars and spent much time together during their workshift. They also socialized a great deal off the job. Many knew each other's family and visits among their co-workers families were common. While there was very little card playing among the parcel post carriers at the post office, there were regularly scheduled card games in their homes. Twice a month, coinciding with paydays, parcel post carriers met at one of their homes and played cards. Parcel post carriers' social relationships were unstructured and informal.

Few played on any of the softball teams, only a handful participated in the bowling league and only in the rarest instance did a parcel post carrier seek promotion to supervisory status.

First-class carriers

First-class letter carriers started their work day at 6:00 A.M. in Manhattan. In the smaller residential stations located in northern Manhattan, Greenwich Village, and the lower East Side, letter carriers were assigned to one-man routes. These stations had a delivery system similar to the Bronx except that in Manhattan there were no routes servicing only one and two family houses. In the Manhattan resid-

entail sections people lived almost exclusively in large apartment buildings, brownstones and city housing projects. In some of the larger residential post offices in Manhattan, two and three man carrier routes were commonplace. Residential routes received one delivery a day while carriers on business routes made three deliveries daily. Some routes were "mixed," i.e., consisted of a large portion of both business and residential deliveries. On mixed routes delivery of the business mail was considered less desirable than that of the residential portion. Therefore, the carriers on mixed routes devised a system whereby the regulars rotated their delivery sequence duties between the residential and business portions on a weekly basis. Whenever a floater or substitute was assigned to a mixed route he would invariably be given the business portion to deliver.

Business routes

Carriers on business routes prepared their mail for delivery between 6:00 and 8:00 A.M. Between 8:00 and 8:30 A.M. they were transported to their own routes where they effected delivery, returning to the post office at 9:30 A.M. This first delivery of mail was heaviest in terms of absolute volume. The carriers were delivering mail that had arrived and been sorted from 1:00 P.M. the preceding day. This included mail the carriers boxed themselves toward the end of their tour of duty, all the night routers had prepared, and everything the carriers sorted from 6:00-8:00 A.M.

In spite of the large volume of mail the delivery trip was relatively quick, taking no more than one hour at most. In fact, most first-trip deliveries were completed in half that time. The reasons for such a rapid delivery included the following: no valuables were delivered on the first trip; the time consuming collection of postage due and other signature required mail forms took place on trips two and three when businesses were more likely to be open; carriers did not have to walk to their routes but were transported by truck; extra help was always assigned to this first delivery. Night routers, floaters and/or substitutes were available and were utilized.

Assignment of work: informal
reward and control systems

The regular routemen designated the "ends," i.e., specific portions of the route each assistant would deliver. Routemen delivered only enough mail to assure they would finish in sufficient time to have a coffee break and return to the station by 9:30 A.M. If anyone was going to be delayed or allocated an extended delivery it would be one of the assistants. This distribution of work by the routemen was the most common cause of friction among letter carriers. Floaters would often complain about the unfair allocations but not usually too vehemently lest they incur the wrath of the routemen and reduce their opportunities for steady floating assignments. Floaters were wary of having their

reputations as dependable workers damaged. They also relied upon the routemen for gratuities. The amount of money a floater might receive in this fashion ranged from a minimum of ten dollars from each routeman assisted on a consistent basis throughout the year to an almost full share of gratuities. In some cases this amount surpassed \$1,000. Few floaters received less than \$100 per year from the routemen and most were given between \$200 and \$300. Substitutes seldom received any gratuities from the routemen. Those that did were given no more than a few dollars. When a substitute felt he was allocated an unfair amount of mail by the routemen he was likely to protest both vehemently and publicly. This seldom accomplished anything more than to alienate him from the routemen. Postal supervisors were reluctant to interfere with the regular routemen's control of delivery distribution on a particular route.

"Break-time" conversations

The first-class carriers "coffee break" at the end of the first delivery trip was actually a "breakfast break." Because of their early starting time few carriers had eaten breakfast before coming to work. By "break-time," usually 9:00 A.M., the carriers had been awake for four to five hours, had traveled to work, and had completed a hectic and heavy portion of the day's deliveries. At a popular eatery near the General Post Office, thirty to forty carriers gathered for breakfast between 8:45 and 9:20 A.M. each day.

Most of these carriers ate a full breakfast. Conversations usually centered on sports and gambling. The horse players studied the racing sheet and shared analyses while suggesting "good bets" in upcoming races. Current events and politics received casual mention. These topics were usually raised by one of the carriers who while reading the newspaper came across an article of interest. Most often the article depicted crime, sex, violence or something generally bizarre. Beginning in approximately 1965, the conversations were often addressed to issues such as the Viet Nam War, youth, especially hippies, college demonstrations, and activities of other groups of workers, particularly conflicts and employment conditions in the public sector.

The letter carriers' political opinions and social commentaries were generally conservative. They were uniformly opposed not as much to the war as to the way it was being conducted. "Why no all out effort?" "Stop playing games." "Wipe them out or get out," were the most often voiced comments. The carriers were disturbed by the behavior of the "spoiled brat" college kids and referred to the "hippies" as "sick." They often referred to themselves as "the only people not making any noise." Some of the younger regulars, many of the floaters and almost all of the subs voiced the opinion that a strike was what was needed to improve wages and working conditions in the post office. The prevailing opinion was that this would not occur until a

"real" union represented postal workers.

Social segregation by
job classification

Although almost every classification of letter carrier frequented the breakfast eatery, the associations by table and section were hardly integrated. Substitutes sat with substitutes and regulars with regulars. Floaters usually sat with floaters, but some would sit with regular routemen. If a parcel post routeman came in he would sit with first-class routemen. A parcel post floater would join the first-class floaters unless he came in with a group of parcel post regulars. In that case he was as likely to stay with them as he was to join the first-class floaters. If a collector came in he would almost always join the floaters. Occasionally, a collector would sit with first-class routemen. This pattern of association by job classification transcended all other social variables including age, race and ethnicity. Sex, another important social variable, was not considered in this 1960s analysis because no woman had yet achieved a permanent route assignment. The few female letter carriers working in GPO at that time were either subs, floaters or night routers. Not until the 1970s were there enough female letter carriers to validate an analysis of their socialization patterns. This will be done in a subsequent chapter.

The second "trip"

First-class letter carriers, after returning to the post office at 9:30 A.M., would prepare the mail for the second delivery. Floaters and subs would be assigned wherever needed. This included collections, parcel post, special delivery or even clerk or mailhandler duties. If no other work was available substitutes would be sent home as they had no guarantee of eight hours per day as did the regulars. Floaters who were regularly assigned to a particular route could usually manage to remain working on that route for the second and third delivery trip. This was most often possible because the floater had arranged his day off to coincide with the routemen's work schedules. Each of the routemen had one day off a week as did the floater. On three and four men routes this covered almost the entire week so long as the floater's day off was on a day all the routemen were working. The scheduling of days off was an important means of control. While the regular routemen had some influence in this area, the ultimate authority was in the hands of the supervisors.

The letter carriers would sign for their valuables and leave the post office to begin the second daily delivery trip at approximately 10:45 A.M. This trip, for the reasons mentioned earlier, would take a longer period of time to effect than did the first delivery. Carriers were expected to return to the post office by noon. This would enable

them to go to lunch or "swing" as it was called, between 12:00 and 12:30 P.M. Letter carriers were required to record the exact time they entered or left the post office. This was done by "hitting the clock" as often as necessary each day. For the regular routemen effecting three daily deliveries this amounted to ten "hits" each day.

The second delivery trip was the one during which the carrier interacted with most of the patrons on the route. Minimally cordial greetings were exchanged, often small conversations were entered into, customer questions and problems were addressed, valuables were delivered and misdelivered mail was picked up. There was enough work to keep the carriers busy until near noon when they were expected to return to the post office. The few minutes slack-time that the carriers might have toward the end of the second delivery trip was likely to be spent relaxing or "freshening-up" at a comfortable spot on their route. This might be a lounge in an office building, a washroom, a tavern or a restaurant. The favorite taverns were those that were also eateries. Many of the carriers utilized the slack-time to buy something to eat during the lunch break. Others just leisurely strolled back to the post office stopping to window shop or chat with local vendors along the way.

Territoriality, a strictly
enforced norm

Inside the post office

Carriers at the GPO in Manhattan spent their lunch period in a variety of ways. Some would go to one of the local taverns or restaurants. Others would eat inside the post office either in the swing room or at their route. The carriers who stayed at their route during lunch usually read the newspaper or any one of a number of magazines ready for delivery. Carriers who spent their lunch break in the swing room played cards, chatted, made purchases from the vending machines, and read books, newspapers or magazines. There was a definite observable pattern in the reading behavior of the letter carriers. These patterns were determined by the structure of the environment and the internal stratification system.

Reading at the route was much quieter and more private than reading in the swing room. Magazines which did not belong to the letter carriers but to patrons on the route could be read at the route without risking a charge of stealing or delaying the mail. A carrier reading a book and/or writing something was likely to choose the quieter and less crowded atmosphere of the route. While this was the reading pattern for regular routemen, it was not for substitutes and floaters. Regardless of what the subs or floaters were reading, they were almost invariably found in the swing room. Substitutes and floaters did not feel comfortable nor were they particularly welcome to spend any break time at a regular's route. Regular routemen were

quite possessive and they guarded their territory jealously. They constantly referred to "my route," "my aisle," "my mail" and even "my floater." Supervisors helped the regular routemen enforce their territorial boundaries by chasing anyone but the regular routemen away from the route. The regular routemen respected each other's territory as well. None would linger by another's route unless at least one of the route's regulars was present. This concept of territoriality was extended beyond the post office facility to the delivery route itself.

Out on the route

Being "off-route" was behavior not only subject to the formal discipline system of the Post Office Department but also to the internal control system of the carriers. Actually, the carriers didn't really care if someone was "off" his own route. Rather, they were concerned about someone being "on" theirs. Regular routemen seldom ventured into another route's territory. If they did it was likely to be for a particular and obvious reason, such as shopping at a specific store or eating in a certain restaurant. In all but the latter case the carrier would almost always be sure to advise the regular routemen of his intention to be on their route or inform them of the reason he was in their territory. One of the reasons the regular routemen were consulted before a carrier appeared on their route to shop was

the very real possibility that they knew the vendor well enough to obtain a discounted price. The main reason, however, was to avoid suspicion.

Routemen were suspicious of any postal employee who appeared on their route. Whether it was a clerk or a carrier, regular or substitute, supervisor or inspector, the routemen would seek to find out exactly why another postal employee was on their route. The routemen were most concerned about being investigated. They were fearful of being reported for not delivering in sequence or according to strict postal regulations; or of having too much slack-time which could lead to an adjustment of their route; or of loitering between deliveries. The routemen were also wary of other postal employees gathering information about their relationships with the patrons on the route, especially concerning the amount or type of gratuities exchanged. Because the routemen did have a specific relationship with each patron on the route and did receive various gratuities from a majority of these patrons, they worried about anyone who might upset or infringe upon that relationship which was continuously being cultivated.

"Personal places"

Another reason regular routemen became upset when another postal employee was seen on their route concerned their "personal places." Every routeman has a personal place. It

may be a storeroom, a stairwell, a basement, an apartment, a little utilized office, a private spot in an eatery or any other place which may provide the carrier with some privacy and protection. These personal places are usually somewhere on the carrier's route. They afford the carrier protection from supervisors, postal inspectors, and the general public. It is a place where the carrier can take an unofficial break from work, i.e., still be "on-the-clock" but not performing official duties. In these personal places the carrier relaxes and is joined by no more than a few trusted individuals. In a carrier's personal place he is likely to eat, sleep, drink, play cards, read, or just chat. It is in these places that carriers tally and divide gratuities. It was the place residential routemen went after finishing their one daily delivery before returning to the post office and the place business routemen were likely to be found during the third daily delivery trip.

The third "trip."
Outwitting boss

The GPO carriers returned from their lunch at 12:30 P.M. They prepared mail for delivery, signed for their valuables and left for their routes by 1:00 P.M. The carriers delivered very little mail on the third trip. Valuables and some first-class letters were usually all the carrier would deliver. Any mail classified less than first-class would

only be delivered if it was addressed to a patron who would be getting a first-class delivery. The first-class mail would usually be delivered only if there were more than a few pieces for a particular patron. Some of the routemen had developed a system whereby only one of the partners assigned to the route would effect the final delivery while the others were free to go directly to their personal place or wherever else they preferred to spend the approximately one and one-half hours until quitting time. Some went directly to the swing room where they played cards. This was not always possible, however, because postal management would periodically "crack-down" on people who were in the swing room when they should have been working. Carriers, though, were less likely to be chased from the swing room than were clerks and the supervisors who checked the swing room were almost always in charge of clerks. They would clear out the clerks but not disturb the carriers. Supervisors who were in charge of letter carriers rarely checked the swing room. When they did it was usually due to pressure being brought to bear by upper management. When this occurred the supervisors almost always forewarned the carriers of their impending "raid" on the swing room. Postal supervisors managed letter carriers more through a system of consultation and cooperation than by intimidation as was common with postal clerks and mail-handlers.

Special delivery: an uncommon
environment of work and
social interaction

The special delivery section of the General Post Office in Manhattan was unique in a number of ways. Substitutes outnumbered regulars by more than two to one. There were thirty subs assigned to the unit, twelve regulars and no floaters. No one had an official route although the regulars delivered to the same general area as often as was possible. The geographic boundaries for the special delivery section were not limited to the confines of the General Post Office zone. Special delivery carriers from GPO delivered all special delivery mail for the west side of Manhattan as far north as Fifty-ninth Street and as far south as all of Greenwich Village. This area encompassed Radio City, Times Square, Midtown, GPO, Old Chelsea and Village postal zones. On the east side of Manhattan, special delivery mail was centralized at the Grand Central post office where carriers assigned to the special unit delivered to six zones on the east side of mid-Manhattan. Special delivery mail for the lower Manhattan post offices was centralized at the Church Street Station. Special delivery mail for the primarily residential stations in northern Manhattan was decentralized, i.e., handled by each post office.

The special delivery carriers received very little supervision. Work was allocated by postal clerks. Special

delivery carriers spent very little time in the post office. They would be given a number of pieces to deliver, leave the station, and return after two or three hours to begin another "run" of mail. During an eight-hour work day, special delivery carriers spent no more than forty-five minutes of work inside the post office. Regulars spent another half hour in the swing room during their lunch break. The subs also utilized the swing room during their lunch period which for subs varied between thirty and ninety minutes, depending upon the volume of special delivery mail and when it was ready for delivery.

During the mid 1960s, an increased volume of special delivery mail was accompanied by a large influx of substitute carriers assigned to the unit at GPO. Prior to April 1964, there were eight subs in the specials section. By June 1964, the unit contained twenty-three substitute carriers. The number of special delivery subs reached thirty-two by the end of 1964. By April 1965, approximately one half of all the substitutes in the special delivery section at GPO were those that had been assigned there between April and June of 1964. Only five subs appointed prior to April 1964 were still in the unit. Twelve others had come into the section between October 1964 and March 1965. The number of regulars in the special delivery unit, twelve, remained constant.

The special delivery subs:
an extended social network

The special delivery substitutes constituted a pretty tight knit group at GPO. They worked six days a week and an average of ten hours a day. Most were between nineteen and twenty-seven years of age. They worked well together and participated in social activities as a group. They organized family style picnics and a softball team independent of the post office leagues. They went to ball games and the race track together and held regularly scheduled card games at each other's homes. Some of the wives had become quite friendly and social visits were commonplace. Wives and girlfriends were invited to the card games and many attended.

By the fall of 1965, the group of special delivery subs who were socially active with each other numbered about twenty. All but three of these men were less than thirty years of age. Of the three older men two were in their mid-thirties and one was in his early forties, one was single and participated in just about all of the group's activities. The two married older men did not play on the ball team, but one attended almost every game. All joined in the drinking, gambling and card playing and all shared the few personal places the group had managed to develop. There were four Hispanics and no blacks in the group. The Hispanics were totally involved in every aspect of the

group's activities. There were only three blacks in the entire special delivery unit. One was a regular, the other two were loners, an older man with an obvious drinking problem and a young fellow who was deeply involved in some sort of religious training.

Perceptions of the union
and social mobility

The substitutes in the special delivery section at GPO were independent of most of the socialization processes involving other postal employees. Few belonged to the letter carrier's union. They felt the union was a "company union," less capable than the ethnic associations or political clubs, none of which were necessary to join unless you were in trouble or were seeking a promotion or special favor. They also believed the union didn't really represent subs wholeheartedly. Some talked of joining the union when they became regulars. Most did not perceive themselves as ever becoming regular letter carriers. The special delivery subs rarely "talked shop." Few, if any (at least no one admitted to it), saw themselves as making a career in the postal service. Conversations that did concern careers focused on what they were going to be after their temporary stint as letter carrier. Many of these subs were preparing for tests or were already on lists relevant to a variety of civil service and public sector positions. The most common were those of police, fire, transportation, and sanitation.

Some of the subs were enrolled in professional and trade schools.

Career changes and the transition from sub to regular

In June 1966, nine of these special delivery subs were promoted to regular and assigned to the first-class unit at the GPO in Manhattan. By the beginning of 1967, sixteen of the subs who had formed the cohesive social group in the special delivery section were regular floaters in the first-class unit of GPO. By May 1969, when the first of these men successfully bid for and received a permanent route assignment, three of the original sixteen had left the post office for other employment. One had become a bus driver, another a sanitation worker, and the third, a fireman. Before the year would end two more would leave. One to take a job as a transit policeman, the other to work as a sanitation man. Two more of these men were on the police list and another was on the sanitation list. All expected to leave the post office when appointed to these city employee positions.

During these years the group maintained its social activities. Even those who had left the post office continued to participate as they had when they were letter carriers. Card games, picnics and social gatherings went on as always. The softball team was quite successful and had acquired a sponsor. They had also organized a football team

which played every Sunday from September through March. Those that remained letter carriers in the GPO spent most of their break-time and lunch periods together. Whenever personal places were acquired they were shared with the group. As floaters they performed a variety of tasks that brought them in almost daily contact with routemen, other floaters and subs. They were often joined in their on-the-job socializing at lunch and break-time by other floaters and substitutes, some of whom had begun playing on the softball and/or football team.

There were forty floaters and between fifteen and twenty substitutes assigned to the first-class section of GPO. While many of the floaters and most of the subs joined this expanding clique of carriers, the regular routemen remained distant. The routemen perceived the group as boisterous and irresponsible. Some resented the fact that many did not belong to the letter carriers' union. Many felt the group did not show enough respect to the regulars and that they spent too much time with substitutes. Actually, the routemen sensed that the group was a threat to their informal control system. The floaters in the group who had been substitutes in the special delivery section had never depended upon regulars for their work opportunities. Nor were they dependent upon regulars for gratuities as was the case in the first-class section. Therefore, they never had to ingratiate themselves in any way to the regulars.

Further, they constituted a large enough social group to not have to depend upon the regulars for social interaction. The routemen viewed this group as undisciplined and lacking in the essential quality for social integration among regular letter carriers--dependability. It would take the dramatic events of 1969 and 1970 to reconcile the animosity the regular routemen had for this group of carriers they referred to as the "young Turks."

Summary

In addition to affecting the socialization patterns of postal workers, the division of labor in the postal system inhibited the development of a cohesive work force. The lack of solidarity among postal workers was directly related to the formal division of labor which separated employees by craft, geographic area, work shift, and tasks. The fragmentation of the postal work force was further emphasized by the internal segmentation of labor arising out of the numerous job classifications ranging from casual and substitute to regulars with specific assignments. The workers themselves helped perpetuate this divisiveness by relating status and their own self-esteem to these differences and then using the resultant social groupings as their primary or secondary reference group within the occupational community of the postal service.

While the formal and informal groupings of postal

workers were numerous and narrowly defined only a few extended their patterns of socialization beyond the work environment.

The clerks more than the carriers were prevented from forming normal socialization patterns because they were more likely to be on late afternoon or early morning shifts, were subject to closer supervision and control, and in many cases, particularly for newer employees, were saddled with the responsibility of a "scheme" which required study time in addition to hours spent at work.

The letter carriers maintained an independent entrepreneurial spirit reinforced by their informal control and unofficial reward systems bestowed upon other carriers, clerks and even postal supervisors. The letter carriers as well as the clerks seldom utilized the formal structure within the postal system when seeking favor, promotion or conflict resolution, but rather individually availed themselves of the local political clubs and ethnic associations.

The most socially integrated and active group of postal workers at the GPO in Manhattan, the substitute letter carriers in the special delivery section, reflect what can almost be considered an underclass in the postal community. Certainly the group constitutes a deviant-case analysis. The special delivery subs were unique in their job classifications, relationship to regular employees, and socialization patterns. They also were a young group, most of

whom perceived their postal employment as temporary. Few belonged to and none participated in the letter carriers' union and their softball games and picnics were conducted outside the channels available through the union and the postal service. Yet within a short period of time, some of these individuals would play an important role in the collective action of the postal workers manifested in the Great Strike of 1970.

The following chapter will attempt to explain how such a diverse, segmented and uncohesive workforce composed of individuals who traditionally sought to resolve conflict in the workplace through surreptitious and independent means could collectively rise up and challenge the authority of the federal bureaucracy.

PART TWO

CONFLICT IN A LARGE-SCALE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY:

THE GREAT POSTAL STRIKE OF 1970

Chapter IV

Conditions and Events Precipitating the Great Postal Strike of 1970

Relative deprivation

One of the most important sociological concepts which will be applied to the analysis of the 1970 postal strike is "relative deprivation." A working definition is provided by Mayer & Buckley, who write about deprivation and its relationship to social behavior:

Beyond a very minimum level, "deprivation" must be defined relative to a number of changing social and psychological factors. A person's expectations, hopes, and fears are a function of his experience with relation to the circumstances of other individuals and groups in the environment and of his definition of what is possible.¹

In N.Y.C., where the strike would begin, the ten thousand employees of the sanitation department had struck and extracted abundant concessions from the city government. Postal employees in N.Y.C. also witnessed successful strikes by transit workers in 1966 and teachers in 1968. Some of the other sensational strikes which involved public sector workers were: the Memphis sanitation workers' strike in

¹Kurt B. Mayer and Walter Buckley, Class & Society, 3d ed. (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 151.

1968, the Charleston hospital workers' strike in 1969 and the Montreal police strike in 1969. The following quote by a striking postal worker highlights the feeling of relative deprivation common to many postal employees in N.Y.C. in 1969. "When I first came on the job in the thirties, we used to get almost as much as a cop and more than the street cleaners. Now where are we? At the bottom."¹

During the decade of the 1960s, postal employees' expectations of what was possible were influenced by a variety of social circumstances both within and external to the postal environment. Postal workers reflected on these occurrences with feelings of anger, outrage, fear, pride, disappointment, bewilderment and encouragement. They were concerned about what might be happening to their social system. The times they were obviously a-changing but for postal employees they didn't seem to be for the better.

The no-strike pledge

In 1966, the discontent that had been simmering among postal workers began to erupt. At the 1966 national convention of the United Federation of Postal Clerks, a motion was raised to amend the constitution to remove the existing no-strike clause. Although the motion was defeated by the delegates in attendance it was an idea whose time had come.

¹Murray Schumach, "Simmering Discontent Sparked Strike," Postal Record 83 (May 1970), p. 28.

At the 1968 convention it passed overwhelmingly. The National Postal Union followed suit at its 1968 convention. The issue was also raised at the National Association of Letter Carriers convention that same year but the carriers did not move to alter their constitution. Instead, they passed a resolution which instructed the national officers to institute litigation to determine the legality of the no-strike pledge and the right-to-strike issue. Meanwhile, the Post Office Department was issuing its contingency plan for work stoppages. Within a year of its publication the Post Office Department would have an opportunity to implement its plan.

Social mobility

Another important sociological concept "social mobility" as formulated in this definition by Ralf Dahrendorf must be considered at this point:

The more upward and downward mobility there is in a society, the less comprehensive and fundamental are class conflicts likely to be. As mobility increases, group solidarity is increasingly replaced by competition between individuals, and the energies invested by individuals in class conflict decrease.¹

In 1968, the President's Commission on Postal Organization addressed the question of mobility in the postal service:

...because of antiquated personnel practices, poor

¹Ralf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 222.

working conditions, limited career opportunity and training, advancement is rare. About 85% of all postal employees are in the five lowest grades, and more than four-fifths finish their careers in the same grade as they started.¹

These conditions support a further theory of Dahrendorf while placing the postal workers in a position approaching conflict:

...If a man's position in the authority structure of an association remains the same throughout his membership in this association, it appears likely that he belongs to a quasi-group as well as to an interest group growing out of this, even if his son or father belongs to a different class.²

Postal employees were increasingly being locked into a particular strata of society. Their salaries which had barely improved during the decade had restricted their opportunities for decent housing, health care, education and leisure activities. Postal workers in N.Y.C. perceived their family life and social status as deteriorating because of the rising inflation and their almost stationary salaries. Twenty percent of the postal employees in N.Y.C. worked a second job. Another 20 percent had a spouse working. Many felt trapped. A letter carrier at GPO described the situation: "I'm caught in the middle. If I don't work a second job I can't provide my kids with things their friends have. If I do work a second job, I'm not home

¹"The Enduring Mail Mess," Time, March 30, 1970, p. 14.

²Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society, p. 220.

enough to be a proper parent. I can't win."

Declining social status

While postal employees felt negatively deprived and downwardly mobile it took an event in October 1969 to publicly highlight their skidding status.

October 17, 1969. Hundreds of mailmen in the New York area applied for welfare benefits because of inadequate wages. The welfare benefits of one letter carrier exceeded \$505 monthly or \$133 more than his take-home pay as a postal employee.¹

While the letter carriers' union utilized the welfare eligibility of its members to demonstrate the need for improved wages, the letter carriers themselves were outraged. They were angry because their situation had so deteriorated but they were also ashamed to be postal employees. Many carriers stopped wearing their uniforms to and from work. An increasing number applied for other public sector employment. Some of these men had worked as many as fifteen years for the Post Office Department yet were ready to begin new careers.

The senior workers

The senior postal employees had less options available to them. Most were just "putting in time" until eligible for retirement. A postal employee could retire at fifty-five years of age if he had worked for at least thirty

¹"Chronology of Legislative Events Affecting NALC 1969-70", Postal Record (May 1970), p. 10.

years. At that point he would receive 56 percent of his average salary for his highest income over a five year period. The senior postal employee in the 1960s was often a man who had taken the job because of the security offered. Many came in after the depression to take advantage of the steady income. They sought postal employment to escape the pressures, uncertainties and confrontations of the private sector which was rife with bankruptcies, strikes, and unemployment. Another wave of workers entered the Post Office Department after World War II. Many of these men had no steady trade or employment due to their young age when enlisting in the military where many spent three to five years. A further inducement to these veterans was a five to ten point advantage on the civil service examination. Also important in attracting these men to postal service was the fact that they received full credit toward vacation and retirement for time spent in the military. One would not expect men who had invested so many years in the postal service and who were approaching retirement eligibility to partake in any action that might jeopardize their security.

Eisenhower and Nixon: broken
promises and hard times for
postal workers

With the election of Richard M. Nixon as President of the United States in 1968, senior postal employees became

increasingly concerned about their security. Many were apprehensive in their evaluation of Nixon as they recalled the difficult years for postal workers when Nixon was Vice President in Dwight D. Eisenhower's Administration. Senior men spoke of Eisenhower's speech at Manhattan Center in 1952, when he promised "to do all I can to improve the wages of postal employees." During his Administration, Eisenhower vetoed four postal pay raises, reduced paid holidays from nine to seven, attempted to eliminate sick leave, and appointed one of history's most unpopular Postmaster Generals, Arthur E. Summerfield.

The broken promises of Eisenhower were not forgotten by postal employees. In 1969, postal workers' fears concerning Nixon grew as Winton M. Blount was chosen Postmaster General. Blount was president of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, a group supporting the concept of a postal corporation. Postal employees were opposed to a corporation type operation because they feared losing their civil service status which postal workers equated with their security. The employee organizations opposed the corporation conversion for the same reason plus fear of a proposed bargaining structure that afforded them little rights. Nixon, however, shortly after taking office, issued a statement in support of the postal workers:

...to that underpaid man who Red Blount spoke about the other day who works in a great city and starts at \$6,000 a year; if he went to the Sanitation De-

partment, he could get \$10,000 a year. Let them know that we in Washington appreciate what they are doing. Let them know that we back them. Let them know that better days are coming...¹

H.R. 10000: focal point
of postal union activity

On April 3, 1969, H.R. 10000 was introduced by Rep. Arnold Olsen of Montana. This bill called for a starting pay for level five postal workers of seven thousand dollars and a top pay of ten thousand dollars after five years of service. This bill was considered essential by postal employees if economic justice and true comparability were to be realized, and ten thousand dollars became the magic number. That was the salary that would bring postal workers on an even keel with the street cleaners in N.Y.C. Actually, the postal employees would be behind the sanitation workers even with comparable salaries because of the differences in fringe benefits, especially the retirement plan. But ten thousand dollars a year after only five years would satisfy the postal employees who, in 1969, could only reach a top pay of \$8,422 after twenty-one years service.

The postal unions had been spending much of their lobbying energies in support of H.R. 4 which called for reform of the postal system within its traditional structure. However, when H.R. 10000 was introduced it created such a

¹"Nixon's Pledge....Pledge Nixed!," The Union Mail
13 (Jan.-Feb. 1970): 1.

furor that three thousand letter carrier delegates went to Washington, D.C. to convince their representatives to support the new bill making HR.10000 postal employees' top priority.

Nixon's plan stirs up old
fears among postal workers

While postal employees were concentrating on HR 10000, the Nixon Administration was preparing its own blueprint for the postal system. On May 28, 1969, Nixon announced his official endorsement of the postal corporation. His postal reform plan included the loss of civil service status for postal workers and a management dominated bargaining and grievance procedure. The fears of the senior postal employees seemed to be actualizing, while the threat to their civil service status barely concerned the junior employees. Senior men continuously voiced concern about their pensions--"Eight years of going backwards under Eisenhower," one old timer stated, "and now the same thing all over again. Twelve or maybe sixteen years of a career with nothing gained, it's just too much." Postal employees already fearful that their retirement incomes would be inadequate in an economy with a spiraling inflation rate, and not having social security credits, viewed the loss of civil service status as the first step in an eventual loss of their civil service retirement benefits. Although this fear was exaggerated and unfounded, it was nevertheless real enough to

affect the behavior of senior postal workers, and it was used to stir up the "old timers," and was overemphasized by anyone seeking to foster discontent or gather support against the corporation concept.

From fear and frustration to
threats and demonstrations

On June 17, 1969, President Nixon announced that a 4.1 percent pay raise would be granted to postal employees effective July 12, 1969. This increase which would provide a pay scale of \$6,176 to \$8,422 without decreasing the amount of years it would take to reach top pay was decried as inadequate by the postal unions and insulting by the rank and file. Within a few days of this announcement, postal employees in N.Y.C. began demonstrating in front of the major post offices. Thousands marched in front of the General Post Office and Grand Central post office in Manhattan and the General Post Office in the Bronx. The demonstrations were quite vocal. Chants of "Strike! Strike! Strike!" frequently erupted from the crowd. In the Bronx, letter carriers carried signs which read: "Postal Strike - July 1st." While the postal union leaders were not publicly declaring strike dates, they were in attendance at the demonstrations and did not discourage the chants nor chastise the sign bearers. In fact, the union officials appeared to enjoy hearing and seeing the strike threats.

The issue of comparability

In Washington, D.C., the National Association of Letter Carriers President, James H. Rademacher, was attacking Nixon's proposed 4.1 percent pay raise for postal employees on the grounds that it failed to achieve comparability. The issue of comparability was a particularly sensitive one for postal employees. The inequities in postal salary levels helped to diminish the respect postal workers had for congressional credibility. Public Law 87-793, enacted in October 1962, pledged that postal employee wages would be made comparable to similar jobs in the private sector, but in spite of this mandate postal salaries continued to fall further behind those in private industry. In 1967, Administration spokesmen were conceding that postal employees would need an average wage increase of 7.2 percent to even begin to achieve comparability. Yet increases were only 3.6 percent in 1965, 2.9 percent in 1966, 4.5 percent in 1967, and 3.2 percent in 1968. Gerald Cullinan cites some specific examples of wage disparities between postal workers and comparable employees in other industries:

In 1969, the average letter carrier or postal clerk was getting \$3.14 an hour. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures showed that railroad clerks were averaging between \$3.29 (in Atlanta) and \$4.31 (in San Diego). Truck drivers were averaging between \$3.66 and \$3.95; newspaper delivery drivers, between \$3.45 and \$4.40; Railway Express drivers, \$3.31 and \$3.66. In 1969, postal carriers and clerks (before the passage of the Act of July 12, 1969) were being paid at entrance, \$6,176 a year (but only after serving time, first, as an hourly substitute). After twenty-one years they

could be paid \$8,442 a year. At the same time the transit company in Washington, D.C. was recruiting bus drivers at a starting wage of \$10,000 a year. In Oakland, California, street sweepers were being paid an entrance wage of \$8,000.¹

While attacking the inadequacy of the Nixon pay proposal, the letter carriers' national president publicly asserted the right of postal workers to strike. Rumors spread like wildfire among the letter carriers in Manhattan and the Bronx that there would be a strike on July 1, 1969!

The Bronx sick-out

On Monday, June 30, 1969, letter carriers at the Kingsbridge station in the Bronx were discussing the possibility of a strike the next day. The union delegate, a young militant carrier who had been telling them that indeed there would be a strike on Tuesday, July 1, was himself on vacation. Two of the senior routemen called the union office to find out if a strike was scheduled for the next day. The union official who was the local vice president in charge of Bronx affairs told the Kingsbridge carriers, "today the Bronx, tomorrow Manhattan." The two routemen relayed this message to the rest of the carriers and a heated discussion ensued. Some felt the message was as clear an instruction as could be given over the telephone and that a strike was obviously to begin in the Bronx on July 1, and spread to Manhattan the following day. Others felt it was

¹Cullinan, The United States Postal Service, p.7.

not clear enough for so serious an action. Mention was made of the delegate being on vacation. Some felt this disproved the strike possibility; others believed it assured it, and the delegate was merely taking a precaution to avoid violating the law. The discussion increasingly turned to the question of how they could stay out of work the next day without actually striking. A compromise strategy was offered. What if everyone called in sick? After a brief discussion, a vote was taken on the sick-out strategy. The rank and file postal employees at the Kingsbridge station voted unanimously to call in sick the next day.

The inspection service reacts

On July 1, 1969, only five of the seventy-eight non-supervisory personnel scheduled to work at the Kingsbridge post office reported for duty. The Post Office Department immediately moved against the absent workers. A postal inspector was dispatched to every one of their homes to question them about their absence. A certified letter-of-charges also arrived at the home of each absent Kingsbridge employee on July 1. The letter which bore the signature of a postal inspector read as follows:

"This is advance notice to you that it is proposed to suspend you from the Postal Service indefinitely pending investigation. The proposed suspension will be effected on an emergency basis not sooner than 24 hours from the receipt of this letter and will be for the purpose of avoiding injury to the Postal Service and general public, pending investigation of the following charge."

"Charge No. I - You engaged in concerted action to withhold your services from the Postal Service, delaying the mails and bringing the Postal Service into disrepute. On July 1, 1969, at Kingsbridge Station of the Bronx, New York Post Office, there were approximately 78 non-supervisory employees scheduled for duty between the hours of 12:01 A.M. and 10:30 A.M. and that only 5 non-supervisory employees reported for duty. You were one of the employees scheduled to report on July 1, 1969 but who, without authorization, failed to report.

"Based on the facts cited above, your retention in an active duty status would be injurious to the Postal Service and to the general public. You are given 24 hours to show reasons why this proposed suspension should not be effected.....

"Pending decision on this proposed indefinite suspension, you will be carried in a non-duty pay status."¹

Although the letter of charges stated that the suspension would not take effect before twenty-four hours, the Kingsbridge employees were not allowed to enter the post office when they reported for duty at 6:15 A.M. on July 2. Officials of the letter carriers union arrived at Kingsbridge station at 8:00 A.M. but were unable to negotiate a return to work.

The sick-out spreads

Word of the Kingsbridge sick-out reached some of the other post offices in Manhattan and the Bronx. A group of letter carriers at GPO in Manhattan refused to hit back on the clock after returning from lunch when they learned of the "strike" in the Bronx. They returned to work only after

¹James Hogan, personal letter.

an official of the letter carriers' union, who was summoned to the station by the union delegate, assured them there was no strike in the Bronx and implored them to "cool it." Letter carriers at the Throgs Neck post office in the Bronx also called the union to find out what was going on. They spoke to the vice president in charge of Bronx affairs who told them "today Kingsbridge, tomorrow the Bronx." While the letter carriers of Throgs Neck station were debating whether or not they should join the "strike," the union delegate called the union and reported that the union had advised that they continue working. In spite of the delegate's warning, sixteen Throgs Neck carriers called in sick on July 2. The Post Office Department moved against the Throgs Neck carriers exactly as it had against the Kingsbridge postal workers.

The penalties

A total of seventy-two letter carriers and sixteen clerks was placed in a non-pay status and suspended indefinitely. The unions which represented the clerks and carriers, the Manhattan Bronx Postal Union and Branch 36 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, decried the mass suspensions. The unions insisted that there was no conspiracy and argued for each case to be judged separately on its own merits. Within a few days, fifteen carriers from Kingsbridge and two from Throgs Neck were exonerated,

primarily on the basis of medical certification which attested to their being ill on July 1. The remaining fifty-five carriers and sixteen clerks served suspensions of two or three weeks and were only able to return to work after signing a statement in which they accepted the penalty and expressed a desire to continue employment with the postal service.

While the postal employees were on suspension, they were replaced by subs and floaters from nearby Bronx stations and twenty-five college students who were hired at three dollars per hour. The quality of mail service at the Kingsbridge and Throgs Neck post offices was adversely affected during the suspensions. Window service was reduced, deliveries were delayed and customer complaints increased.

The unions react

Shortly after their return to work, the postal clerks were notified by the Manhattan Bronx Postal Union that all wages they had lost during their suspensions would be paid to them by the union. The letter carriers were not as fortunate. Their union, Branch 36 NALC, refused to compensate them for lost wages during their suspensions. At a special meeting of Branch 36 on August 5, 1969, the union leadership opposed a motion to reimburse the suspended carriers, claiming "the treasury was too low." Appearing at the special meeting which was called for the purpose of discussing the

ramifications of the work stoppage in the two Bronx post offices was the national president of the NALC, James H. Rademacher. During the meeting, Rademacher belittled the militancy of the N.Y. letter carriers. He challenged the Branch 36 membership to "put up or shut up" and vowed that if H.R. 10000 was not passed he would return to New York in six weeks and personally lead "not a sick-out, but a strike." Rademacher added that he "would be interested in seeing how many of the letter carriers would be willing to back up their tough talk and follow me in a strike." The national president then made his exit through a cheering crowd after receiving a standing ovation from the carriers.

The case of the rank and file

While the N.Y. letter carriers were impressed with the militancy of the national president, they were disappointed with the refusal of the local to make up the pay lost by the suspended Bronx workers. Attempts were made by rank and file letter carriers to bring enough supporters to the monthly Branch 36 membership meeting in September to pass a motion to pay the Bronx carriers. Although most carriers had returned from vacation and the Bronx sick-out was a popular topic of discussion, the rank and file group could not muster a majority in favor of their motion at the September meeting. It was not until the bowling league began to form that support for the motion to pay the Bronx carriers picked

up. For the first time carriers from other stations particularly those in Manhattan, received a first hand report on what had occurred from carriers who had been involved in the sick-out. The carriers returned to their stations, which included some of the largest in the city, with details of the sick-out and a plea for support of the motion to pay the carriers for monies lost. The motion would be reintroduced at the monthly Branch 36 membership meeting in November.

The Branch 36 meetings were always held in Manhattan and seldom had more than seventy people in attendance. The majority of carriers at these meetings were station delegates. Few members who did not hold elective or appointed positions in the union ever attended Branch 36 meetings. It was not until the November meeting that more than one hundred carriers were in attendance. Most of those who were not union representatives were carriers from the Bronx. When the question concerning pay for those involved in the sick-out was raised, the treasurer of Branch 36 explained that the union "could not afford to pay our carriers from Kingsbridge and Throgs Neck." The reimbursement motion once again failed to carry.

Attendance at the December meeting increased only slightly. This, however, was still significant because the December meeting was often cancelled due to the tremendous increase in mail volume and the fact that many carriers are

expected to be working overtime. Once again the union leadership and the delegates defeated the motion to pay the Bronx carriers. The rank and file was successful, however, in extracting a promise from the union officials to provide a financial statement to all members attending the next monthly meeting. This, the carriers felt was necessary in order to allow a complete and intelligent discussion concerning the union's ability to reimburse the Bronx carriers. During the meeting a few rank and file letter carriers spoke in favor of a job action during the Christmas holiday season. Although little support was garnered for this action, the meeting ended on a raucous note. As the president asked for a motion to adjourn, cries of "Strike! Strike! Strike!" arose from a group of carriers. While the members were filing out of the hall a group of about fifty remained stamping their feet, clapping their hands and screaming, "Strike! Strike! Strike!"

Concurrent events

While the Branch 36 letter carriers were debating issues related to the sick-out at each monthly membership meeting, a series of events which would contribute to the impending conflict was unfolding. In October, hundreds of N.Y.C. letter carriers applied for welfare. Later that month, the U.S. District Court ruled that the no-strike oath required of government workers was unconstitutional. This

decision was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court by Postmaster General Blount. On October 14, the House of Representatives approved H.R. 13000. This bill would provide postal employees with an immediate 5.4 percent salary increase followed by an additional 5.7 percent raise in July 1970. H.R. 13000 also reduced the years required to attain the top salary grade from twenty-one to eight. The bill also established a Board of Arbitration which would rule on proposed yearly wage increases. The postal unions, particularly the NALC, put full support behind H.R. 13000. President Nixon, meanwhile, attacked the proposed legislation as "inflationary" and vowed to veto any pay raise bill that did not include his postal corporation proposal.

The Nixon-Rademacher agreement

The postal unions and the Nixon administration were at an impasse. The unions had enough political clout to prevent the passage of any corporation bill. However, they did not have enough influence to override a Presidential veto of a pay raise. The unions' position was further weakened on December 12, when the Senate passed a watered-down version of H.R. 13000 which contained only a 4 percent pay increase in January 1970 and a 3 percent increase in July 1970. On December 18, 1969, James H. Rademacher, president of the NALC, met with President Richard M. Nixon in an attempt to resolve the stalemate which was preventing both postal re-

form and pay improvements from being realized. Also present at the meeting were Charles Colson, Special Counsel to the President, and Henry Cashen, Deputy Assistant for Domestic Affairs. Rademacher was pushing for a new package proposal which the leaders of all seven exclusive postal unions had agreed to in principle the preceding day. The proposal had been outlined by Congressman Udall of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service. Basically, the proposal called for a "Postal Authority" instead of a corporation. It provided for a \$412 wage increase and a system of collective bargaining which included binding arbitration. It also included the continuation of civil service status for the employees' retirement system, and a promise to consider a 5.7 percent pay raise effective July 1970. After agreeing to the proposal, the postal union leaders conferred with the Chairman of the Committee, Thaddeus J. Dulski who agreed to give the proposal serious consideration even though he had been opposed to creating a postal corporation. It was Dulski's bill H.R. 4, which called for reforms within the traditional structure of the post office department that was languishing under the threat of a presidential veto.

The Nixon-Rademacher meeting led to an agreement that both pledged to support. This agreement included a 5.4 percent pay increase tied to a postal corporation concept. Most important to the union president was a provision which

called for binding arbitration. Rademacher immediately announced his support of the agreement and committed the NALC's resources to insuring its passage. Leaders of the other postal unions were incensed. First, because Rademacher had met alone with the President and secondly, and most importantly, that he had reached an agreement and committed the NALC to supporting it without conferring with the other union leaders.

The unions at war:
industrial vs. craft

The most vociferous opposition to the Nixon-Rademacher plan came from the sixty thousand member National Postal Union (NPU). This industrial, as opposed to the craft unions in the postal service, feared that the postal reform plan would preclude it from participating in the collective bargaining and arbitration procedures. Although NPU was the third largest postal union, no provision was made for it to be recognized at the national level. The NPU believed its very existence would be threatened if it was left out of the bargaining process open to the exclusive craft unions. Its largest affiliate, the twenty-six thousand member Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union (MBPU), led the fight against acceptance of the postal reform proposal. MBPU disseminated an almost daily litany of reasons for the postal unions to reject the corporation concept. MBPU reminded the postal workers of H.R. 10000 with its seventy-five hundred to ten thousand

dollar salary scale. Leadership of the MBPU met with the leaders of Branch 36 in a futile attempt to convince the carrier representatives to join in opposition to the corporation. The MBPU leaders accused the Branch 36 officials of being "out of touch with the times" and predicted that the N.Y. carriers would revolt before they would accept the reform proposal. Unable to elicit any support from the carrier union, MBPU launched an all out attack on the proposed corporation and the carrier leadership. The MBPU assault included a drive to register letter carriers as members of this industrial union.

While there had never been an official no-raiding policy concerning the enlistment of members in each of the postal unions, an informal agreement existed which recognized and respected the sovereignty of craft jurisdiction. The NPU, an industrial union not recognized officially at the national level, had a membership which consisted primarily of postal clerks. However, there was a large group of mailhandler members and a scattering of each of the other crafts. Few letter carriers belonged to NPU. Even in N.Y.C. the number of letter carriers belonging to MBPU was insignificant.

Local union leadership styles

Prior to 1968, the president of the N.Y. letter carriers, a charismatic fellow who held that office for more

than fifteen years, was the dominant postal union figure in N.Y.C. The postal clerks, although far outnumbering the carriers in N.Y.C. recognized the Branch 36 president as preeminent. After his untimely death in the summer of 1968, the influence of Branch 36 on local postal and political matters began to wane. The MBPU president, himself a charismatic fellow, moved to take advantage of the leadership vacuum by projecting himself to the top of postal politics in N.Y.C. The new president of Branch 36, who was a likeable fellow, had very little administrative and almost no political experience. He was quite unprepared to assume the leadership position fate had caused him to inherit. Most of his union related activities had, prior to 1968, involved entertainment committees. His appointment to the newly created position of executive vice president by the Branch 36 president shortly before his death was seen as a favor to a friend rather than as administrative advancement. The new president had formerly worked at the same post office as the previous president and, in fact, had served as floater on his route. All in all, the new president of Branch 36 was no match for the volatile president of the MBPU. Sensing his inability to compete directly with the MBPU leader, the Branch 36 president relied almost exclusively on the NALC national president for advice and direction. He would also depend on the very competent leader of the Brooklyn letter carriers local, especially for technical advice related to

procedures and legislation affecting the carriers.

The Branch 36 rank and file
moves to the forefront

While the Branch 36 leadership was becoming increasingly dependent on the national office, the rank and file letter carriers in N.Y. were becoming increasingly discontented with the national union. Rademacher, keeping his promise to Nixon, had instituted an all-out effort to ensure passage of the pay-reform package. Nixon's part of the agreement, however, was running into difficulties. First, the plan the administration submitted to the House Committee contained much on the corporation concept but little else. Administration spokesmen would later explain that some pledges to the unions had been "inadvertently omitted." Secondly, this confusion, along with the opposition of the other postal unions and the Christmas recess, foreclosed any action being taken before the new year. As 1969 drew to a close, the nation had experienced a record rise of seven percent in the cost of living and postal employees had yet to receive any of the promised comparability pay raises. In fact, many were actually taking home smaller paychecks than at the beginning of the year because of an increase in pension and medical benefits fees.

A few days before the January membership meeting of Branch 36, the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union distributed a leaflet in every N.Y.C. post office which raised important

questions about the postal reform plan. The leaflet blasted the Nixon-Rademacher package as "full of holes." The agreement, stated MBPU, did not guarantee comparability. Nor did it reduce the years to reach top pay. Further, it included no right to strike and most importantly guaranteed civil service status for only two years. The leaflet also claimed that fringe benefits were not to be improved prior to January 1973, in spite of the skyrocketing costs of hospitalization premiums.

More than two hundred letter carriers were in attendance at the January meeting of Branch 36. As promised at the December meeting, financial reports were distributed by the union. Questions were raised concerning the expenditure of twelve thousand dollars of union monies for a press agent and another three thousand dollars for Christmas gratuities. Carriers wanted to know how these monies could be expended while the Branch treasury claimed the union could not afford to pay the Bronx carriers involved in the sick-out. After much debate a motion to reimburse the carriers was passed by a majority of those in attendance. The struggle which began more than six months before was over. The rank and file letter carriers, however, did not reduce the fervor of their questions to the union leadership with this victory in hand. In fact, apparently buoyed by their success, the carriers unleashed a steady barrage of questions and motions from the floor. By the time the meeting concluded, the car-

riers had voted to reject the Nixon-Rademacher agreement and had endorsed their own substitute program which called for: full payment by the government of all pension, hospitalization and life insurance premiums; a twenty year optional retirement regardless of age; the right to strike; comparability for retirees; full payment of hospitalization and life insurance premiums for retirees; and the elimination of the widow's deduction in these plans. A majority also voted to commit the branch to strike if the NALC did not agree to substitute their program for the Nixon-Rademacher plan.

The strike survey

The Branch 36 leadership, in an attempt to override the strike mandate, devised a strike ballot which was to be distributed to all members, the results of which, the union announced, would be made public in July. The rank and file was outraged. Union leadership had always taken the position that policy would be set by those that attended the meetings. Never before had a motion been subject to referendum. It appeared that voting at the meetings was acceptable only when the union leaders' positions were supported. The first time an opposing motion carried, the process was changed. The rank and file carriers were apprehensive concerning the composition of the strike survey and they were certainly against delaying the results until July. Prepar-

ations began to bring as many rank and file carriers as possible to the February membership meeting.

On January 20, the strike survey ballots were circulated. Page one was divided into two sections. Section A outlined the Nixon-Rademacher agreement and stated that it had also been unanimously endorsed by the Branch 36 officers and delegates at the December Executive Board Meeting. Section B stated that majority of members at the January membership meeting had voted to reject the proposal outlined in section A, and then proceeded to list the program contained in the rank and file motion. Page two of the strike survey also contained two parts. The first half of the page advised each member that a strike against the government or the Post Office Department was illegal and no one would receive pay for time not worked; that an individual who does strike may not hold a position in the government; could be fined \$1,000 and may be imprisoned for up to a year and a day; and that Branch 36 does not have the support or cooperation of any other postal crafts or unions. Also cited was the necessity to complete the form in its entirety or it would be void. The second half of page two contained the strike ballot. Three choices were provided. First was the option to strike locally only, i.e., Manhattan and Bronx, even if no one else supported Branch 36. The second choice was not to strike locally only. The third option was to strike only if called by the national office on

a nationwide basis. The ballot then required the member's name to be printed and signed, the post office where he worked to be indicated, and the union delegate's signature verifying this information. The rank and file carriers already angered because a ballot was being utilized were outraged at the format of the ballot. Their suspicions concerning the unwillingness of local leadership to reflect the will of the membership were confirmed. They felt they could not trust the union nor depend upon such a biased strike survey as an indicator of actual support for a strike. A massive effort to bring more members to the February membership meeting of Branch 36 was launched by the rank and file carriers.

Nixon breaks his pledge
to the postal workers

On February 3, 1970, any confidence the postal workers may have had in the Nixon Administration's promises was dashed. In spite of the President's previous speech which pledged recognition "to that underpaid man," Nixon's budget message stated:

...Because the need to control and contain the inflationary spiral is of paramount importance at this time, I recommend that the comparability pay raise (which requires congressional action) be deferred six months beyond the recent pattern, and be made effective January, 1971...¹

It was inconceivable to the postal workers that they were

¹"Nixon's Pledge...Pledge Nixed!," The Union Mail, p. 1.

being singled out and expected to shoulder the burden of inflation. Further they felt, if not raising postal wages was a cure for inflation, then it stood to reason that they were also guilty of being a cause of inflation. The whole thing seemed ludicrous and unacceptable especially in view of the fact that Congress had recently voted itself a 41 percent pay raise and the President's salary had been increased from \$100,000 to \$200,000 during the same "inflation." The postal workers in February 1970 were in a state approaching conflict which has been appropriately described in a theory postulated by Lewis Coser:

Before a social conflict between negatively and positively privileged groups can take place, before hostile attitudes are turned into social action, the negatively privileged group must first develop the awareness that it is, indeed, negatively privileged. It must come to believe that it is being denied rights to which it is entitled. It must reject any justification for the existing distribution of rights and privileges.¹

For the postal workers it was their eligibility for welfare which more than anything else made them aware of their being negatively privileged. The rights to which they felt entitled but were denied to them included the right to strike and comparability. The justification for the existing distribution of rights and privileges was rejected in light of Nixon's broken promises, his placing the burden of inflation on the postal workers, the 40 percent pay raise

¹Lewis Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, (New York: The Free Press), p. 37.

granted to Congress, and the doubling of the President's salary. The postal workers were moving closer to an inevitable conflict situation in almost direct proportion to their increasing dissatisfaction with and distrust of their union leadership. Ralf Dahrendorf explains how this latter type of tension affects conflict situations:

What appears to be an interest group of the subjected turns out to be an agent of the dominating group as well. It seems probably that this kind of perverted conflict regulation will increase rather than diminish both the violence and the intensity of conflict by simultaneously opening and blocking one of its channels of expression.¹

Increasing tensions between
the rank and file and
the union leadership

Almost four hundred letter carriers attended the February 12 membership meeting of Branch 36. This was the largest crowd at any regular meeting in the recent history of the Branch. As the meeting began, a group of letter carriers circulated leaflets which asked members to revoke their dues check-off to show dissatisfaction with the union leadership. The leaflet explained that a revocation of dues check-off would not change a person's membership status but would cause the union to have to personally collect dues rather than have the monies automatically deducted from the member's paycheck. The branch president called for the

¹Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society, p. 263.

men to stop distributing the leaflets. A few minor skirmishes, actually pushing incidents, broke out as union officials tried to confiscate the pamphlets. The majority screamed "leave them alone, let us see for ourselves, we'll make up our own minds." The president's inability to control a simple situation was evident. Many times during the meeting he was hooted down. More than once he recessed the meeting as the shouting became intolerable.

The major argument during the meeting involved the issue of referendum voting. The question was, "since the union had surveyed all members on the strike question, would this be the procedure for all motions?" The rank and file placed a motion on the floor which called for referendum voting on all issues including amendments to the by-laws and dues increases. The union administration was opposed to the motion. During the vote, a fight erupted. In an attempt to restore order, the president recessed the meeting. When the meeting was reconvened the president allowed further discussion on the motion rather than continuing the vote which had been in progress at the recess. It was obvious that no rules of order nor parliamentary procedure were being followed. The discussions rarely addressed the issue of referendum when a rank and file carrier had the floor. Instead, the speakers utilized their time exhorting the membership to strike. The majority of those in attendance seemed to enjoy the strike rhetoric. but many opposed

the lack of proper procedure and were content to await the results of the strike survey.

After what seemed like endless debate and discussion, the motion for referendum voting was narrowly defeated. The rank and file immediately placed a motion to strike on March 15, on the floor. As the arguments pro and con became more heated and extended, many letter carriers began leaving the meeting. By the time the motion was voted upon only 250 carriers were in attendance. The motion to strike was passed by a slight majority. The branch president, fearful that this job action could materialize, did a hasty turnabout and announced that the membership would not have to wait until July for results of the strike survey. He stated that the results would be made public at the next regular membership meeting which was scheduled for March 12. The meeting ended without any concrete program emerging. The union leadership's position appeared to be further polarized from that of the membership. The rank and file, which at this point was no more than a loose amalgam of dissatisfied letter carriers once again returned to their stations more determined than ever to involve as many members as possible at the next membership meeting.

Debate in the stations.
The role of the opinion leader

At the General Post Office, the handful of regulars who had attended the February meeting implored the other

carriers to attend the March meeting. The union delegate and assistant delegate referred to the two routemen who had been attending the recent branch meetings as troublemakers. The routemen argued that the members should attend the meeting and judge the issues for themselves. The two routemen made a personal appeal to the captain of the softball team which consisted primarily of the floaters who had worked together in the special delivery unit. They asked him to attend the meeting and to bring as many of the "young Turks" as he could. This particular "young Turk" had only recently joined the letter carriers' union. He had attended only one previous membership meeting and was of the opinion that his suspicions were confirmed and the union was in fact an "incompetent organization." He was himself, however, an informal leader among the younger letter carriers and had established relationships among some of the regular routemen since successfully bidding for a route of his own about eight months prior. One of the partners on the "young Turks" route was a brother of one of the routemen who had been attending the meetings. The routemen first convinced the brother to attend the meeting. Then the brother "worked on" the "young Turk" every day in the personal place they shared on their route. This personal place, a meeting room in an apartment building, was shared by five of the seven residential routemen of GPO. After a few days of discussion and persuasion, the "young Turk" and two of the residential

regulars agreed to attend the meeting. Further, the "young Turk" promised to convince as many others as he could to also attend. The significance of an informal leader has been cited by Mark Van de Vall in his book Labor Organizations. Van de Vall, writing about opinion leaders states: "They have cohesive impact which stems from the fact that at any social level, men are most receptive to advisers from their own social ranks."¹ The GPO opinion leader kept his promise to try and convince carriers to attend the meeting. He spoke with as many people as he could on an almost daily basis for the few weeks preceding the meeting. In his conversations with the carriers he pledged to take the floor at the meeting and "expose the union leadership once and for all." He promised to make them either "put up or shut up" and told the carriers that if they came to the meeting they would not be disappointed. He also spoke of the importance of the issues at hand and why it was necessary for everyone to participate. Surprisingly, it was the regular routemen rather than the subs and floaters who were most impressed by the opinion leader's appeal. As more and more routemen said they would attend the meeting, the opinion leader appealed to the other "young Turks" on a personal basis. He asked them to come to the meeting as a per-

¹Mark Van de Vall, Labor Organizations: A Macro-and Micro-Sociological Analysis on a Comparative Basis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 102.

sonal favor to support him "in case there was any trouble." During this time the postal pay and reform package languished. Even among the unions disagreement continued concerning the appropriate proposal to endorse. Chairman Dulski, of the House Post Office Committee, frustrated by the inability of the unions to resolve their differences and influenced by the National Postal Union and its N.Y. affiliate MBPU, decided to once again push for passage of his bill H.R. 4, in spite of Nixon's promised veto.

Dissent spreads to the suburbs

Meanwhile, the revolt of letter carriers against the position espoused by their union leadership was intensifying and not limited to Branch 36. At a meeting of letter carriers on Long Island on February 28, 1970:

...a resolution was unanimously adopted by 1,100 persons in attendance calling for District President John Allione to have his 12,000 members participate in a strike commencing March 16 or resign from his position as District President....The purpose of the strike was to be for demands that members of the Long Island District Association be granted a special area wage along with 20-year retirement, completely paid health insurance and other benefits.¹

The Long Island leadership chose to ignore the mandate of the membership. "On Thursday, March 12, 1970, following House Committee action on the pay-reform legislation, the Executive Board of the Long Island District Association

¹"Carriers Not Revolutionists," The Postal Record 83 (May 1970), p. 32.

voted against striking and in support of the pending legislation."¹ The appeal for an area wage was at the base of almost every demand issued by discontented locals. The granting of this item alone may well have prevented any strike action. The legitimacy of the demand is supported by the following statement:

Branch 36 had urged the "area wage" under Section 504 of the 1962 Federal Salary Reform Act, allowing the Civil Service Commission to set special wage levels when comparable private wages were higher enough to handicap significantly the Government's recruitment or retention of well-qualified persons. Branch 36 argued this section could be invoked because the postal service in Manhattan alone had 900 carrier jobs unfilled, and a turnover of 300 employees a month.²

The Branch 36 membership
meeting, March 12, 1970.
Results of the strike survey
and a warning from the
national union

Almost eight hundred letter carriers showed up at the March 12 membership meeting of Branch 36, in spite of the fact that the official meeting notice failed to list the time and date of the meeting. The meeting, held in a hotel on Manhattan's westside, was smaller than any of the meeting rooms previously used by the Branch. Close to 600 carriers crowded into a room where signs stated that 380 people constitute its legal capacity. An adjoining hallway

¹Ibid.

²Peter Kihiss, "Strikers in City Yield to Leaders," New York Times, March 26, 1970, p. 50.

and anteroom were overflowing with carriers, and some left for lack of space. The crowd was hot, angry and impassioned when the meeting was called to order. The recording secretary began to read the minutes from the previous meeting, but a motion to dispense with the minutes came from the floor, was immediately seconded, and voted on affirmatively. The financial report, and the sick and death benefits report met the same fate. Cries went up from the crowd to hear the results of the strike ballot, and the branch president stated that he would announce the results after he read a letter from the national president. The president rescinded when the crowd insisted on first hearing the strike survey results: 486 agreed to go on strike locally only; 40 would not strike; 2,083 would strike only if called by the national office. Amidst much grumbling and scattered booing, the branch president proceeded to read the letter from the national president which contained reassurances that the Nixon-Rademacher plan would soon be approved and that postal employees would receive a 5.4 percent pay raise along with a postal corporation. As the letter concluded with a warning that any individual or branch taking any unauthorized job action would be suspended from the union, many of the carriers jumped to their feet screaming, "We don't want 5.4 percent or the corporation, and we don't need the national union."

The leadership begins to lose
control of the meeting as
guest speaker further angers
the crowd

Realizing that the meeting seemed as if it might get completely out of hand, the president announced that a distinguished speaker was present and introduced him as "the militant president of the Brooklyn letter carriers." A thunderous ovation greeted the visitor. He began his speech by complimenting the large turnout of letter carriers, praising their concern and their militancy. He assured them that their brothers in Brooklyn shared their feelings and would be united with Branch 36 in whatever action became necessary. He lashed out at the Nixon Administration and was particularly vehement in his criticism of Congress. He spoke of the ability to lead 100 percent of his members out on strike if economic justice was not forthcoming. He used what appeared to be unnecessary and exaggerated statements such as "we will put the Post Office Department out of business" and "we will bring this country to its knees." The guest speaker's rhetoric seemed to please the audience. After a few minutes, however, the carriers' awe began to fade and questions shot out from the crowd. "When, when? Give us a date." Others shouted that they didn't want to bring the country to its knees or put the Post Office Department out of business, they only wanted a decent raise and a better retirement. One carrier asked the speaker what he meant by

"economic justice." The Branch 41 president replied, "We have a plan." The men retorted, "What is it? Tell us the plan." The Brooklyn union leader did not respond to the carriers' questions. Instead, he merely repeated his attack on Congress and the Post Office Department. The carriers continued to throw questions at him. "What about Rademacher?" "We don't want 5.4 percent." "What about the corporation?" The crowd of carriers began to surge toward the speaker's platform still screaming their questions.

The rise of the informal leaders

The Branch 36 president allotted time for concerned carriers to ask questions to which the union leadership could respond. Because the room was so small and the crowd so large and noisy, only questions from people toward the front of the hall could be heard by the union officials. The members in the back of the hall, the anteroom and the hallway could not hear the questions at all. The president allowed the members with questions to use the stage with the microphone, and the questions became more like speeches. Those who spoke in favor of strike or in opposition to the union leadership held the crowd's attention, while those who spoke in support of the union's position were hooted down.

About sixty carriers from GPO were at the meeting. Most of them were floaters and subs who had come at the urging of the captain of the softball team who had promised to

speak on their behalf, and although he was close to the speaker's platform, he made no attempt to step toward the microphone or be officially recognized. Suddenly a group of the GPO carriers began shoving their way toward the stage yelling, "we have a speaker, we have a speaker, let this man speak." They were virtually pushing the man toward the microphone, when the branch president passed the microphone to the speaker asking him to identify himself to the audience. The carrier who was in full uniform, stated his name, station and route number, adding that he was a regular routeman. The speaker had the floor for almost ten minutes with absolute attentiveness while he spoke of unity and outlined a program of organization in the event of a strike and reminded the audience of the political clout of the sanitation men with only one-sixth of the membership of N.Y.C. postal workers. He addressed the issue of leadership and disputed the union's "secret plan" and refusal to set a strike date, and suggested that the membership could set its own date, and if the leadership would not change, the members could change the leaders. In conclusion, the speaker questioned the Branch president,

"Mr. president, is it not true that you wear two hats--one as local president, the other as a member of the national executive board? Is it also not true that you are obliged to speak for our interests as local president but receive contrary direction from the national office? So I ask you, Mr. president, will you step down from the national position and give us leadership at this crucial time or will you step down as our local representative and allow us to select

a true and capable leader. Mr. president, you cannot serve two masters."

The collapse of the
formal leadership

The president now was slumped against the mirrored wall behind the speaker's platform, visibly shaken and mumbling, "He's right, he's right." The executive vice president of the branch urged him to "give them a date, give them a date." The president remained silent. The Brooklyn union leader grabbed the microphone and began an exact repetition of his earlier rhetoric, only this time the crowd did not let him get beyond his few cliches before booing and shouting "Go back to Brooklyn."

The Branch 36 president took the microphone stating that he would adjourn the meeting. The carriers roared, "Go ahead and take your cronies with you, we'll have our own meeting." Sporadic threats were shouted, "We'll hang you." The president replied, "That may well be." The president relinquished the chair and for the remainder of the meeting participated as a member and was addressed as carrier instead of chairman.

The rank and file take
control of the meeting

The recording secretary assumed the chairman's role. A motion from the floor was proposed to convene a strike meeting on Sunday, March 15 and called for all post office

employees to be invited. Clerks and carriers from all boroughs of N.Y.C. would be polled to measure support for a job action. The motion was immediately seconded. The former chairman of the meeting attempted to add an amendment to the motion which would postpone any meeting involving members until he had personally met with the other union leaders, but this amendment was voted down. The executive vice president, who also served as the parliamentarian, took the microphone and ruled the entire motion out of order, but the carriers were not to be denied, and the crowd pressed for a vote. A deafening chant rose up from the audience, "Vote! Vote! Vote! Vote!" The union leadership put forth one last effort to prevent the vote. The president spoke: "There would be no place big enough to accomodate seventy thousand people." He pleaded further, "No place could be made available in so short a notice." The carriers having pushed their motion this far wanted only action, and screamed, "Use Central Park!" The president replied that "it would not be legal." The members chided the president, "Let someone try to stop us," and they told him not to come if he didn't want to, they would have the meeting without him, whereupon the president surrendered. He promised to meet with the president of MBPU the next day and to set up the general meeting as soon as possible. The vote on the motion was unanimous. The meeting was then adjourned. The president remained on the speaker's platform and answer-

ed informal questions. He stated that he was "certain the clerks would not support any job action," and if the carriers went on strike they would "virtually stand alone."

Many people would later wrongfully give credit to radical political groups for instituting the strike action. In reality, an appropriate explanation can be found in the way Dahrendorf describes the relationship of quasi-groups to leadership, and ideology to conflict groups:

The availability of possible organizers, founders, and leaders is essentially a technical prerequisite which must be satisfied for unorganized quasi-groups to be transformed into organized interest groups. The organizers are one of the ferments, not the starting point or cause of organization....

Either there must be a person or circle of persons who take on themselves the task of articulation and codification, or, alternatively, an "ideology," a system of ideas, must be available which in a given case is capable of serving as a program or charter of groups....

Ideologies understood as articulated and codified manifest interests are again but a technical condition of organization. Ideologies do not create conflict groups or cause conflict groups to emerge. Yet they are indispensable as obstetricians of conflict groups, and in this sense as an intervening variable.¹

The union leadership fails to follow the membership mandate

The mandate passed unanimously at the Branch 36 membership meeting was not implemented by the union leadership; instead of a strike meeting, the union leaders scheduled a

¹Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society, pp. 185, 6.

strike vote only. Late in the afternoon of March 13, notices were posted in every station advising the carriers that a vote would be conducted from 6:35-9:00 P.M. on Tuesday, March 17, 1970 at Manhattan Center. The union leadership deliberately violated the mandate of the membership evidenced in the following statement from the branch president: "At a crucial membership meeting, it was the dictate of the members themselves that we hold a special meeting as to whether we would determine a job action."¹ Also contrary to the mandate, the Branch 36 leadership did not meet with any of the MBPU officials, but rather with their own national president.

The postal inspectors
are activated

Meanwhile, the Postal Inspection Service was on alert, and on Friday, March 13, Miscellaneous Bulletin 80, Contingency Planning for Work Stoppages, was disseminated to all postal inspectors. Up to this point the inspectors had been most concerned about the threat of a strike which had been made by the president of the Hicksville, Long Island branch of the NALC. This local leader had been "stirring up" letter carriers in Nassau and Suffolk counties and was threatening to "take them out" on March 16. The Postal Inspection Service believed that the Hicksville carriers would not be

¹Gustave J. Johnson, "Justice for the Postal Workers," The Chief, April 1, 1970, p. 3.

followed by the other crafts nor was support from any other NALC branches evident. The inspectors also had the notice advertising the provisions of 18 USC 1919 (strike law), posted on employee bulletin boards in all N.Y. area post offices.

On Saturday, March 14, at the main post office in Far Rockaway, N.Y., eighteen of the thirty-one carriers scheduled for duty called in sick. Two inspectors were immediately dispatched to the station. After examining records which showed a usual high incidence of Saturday absences, and receiving cooperation from carriers who were scheduled off but reported for duty when called by the postmaster, and finding the NPU and NALC presidents working, the inspectors decided not to make house checks on the eighteen carriers who reported sick. Attention would be paid instead to the carriers scheduled to work on Monday, March 16.

The postal workers form
informal networks of
communication

All during that weekend, rank and file carriers exchanged opinions about what had transpired as well as about what might be about to happen. One group of seven, members of Branch 36, decided to meet on Tuesday, March 17 near Manhattan Center--prior to the strike vote. These men, all senior carriers, had been active in the union since the Kingsbridge and Throgs Neck sick-out. A few were long-time

dissidents in the union, and one was a union delegate. All but one had been at the March 12 meeting and they had discussed the speaker from GPO, who on Sunday afternoon they had called at home and invited to their March 17 meeting. When rank and file letter carriers contacted the Hicksville carriers and asked them to delay any action they had planned until after the Branch 36 vote, the Hicksville president was pleased because he had been frustrated in his efforts to communicate with or obtain the support of the N.Y.C. and Brooklyn NALC leadership.

On the evening of March 16, the Flushing, Queens branch of the NALC monthly membership meeting was attended by approximately four hundred carriers or one-third of the total branch membership, almost five times the normal attendance. Again, the guest speaker for the evening was the president of the Brooklyn letter carriers. Also at the meeting was the rank and file member of Branch 36, the same opinion leader from GPO, and captain of the carriers' softball team which played almost all its games in Queens; since the GPO carrier lived in Queens, had personal relationships with some of the Flushing carriers who also played in the same newspaper-sponsored softball league, and had at one time in his post office career been a sub-carrier in one of the Queens post offices covered by the Flushing NALC Branch.

While the Brooklyn president was waiting to be introduced, he recognized the Branch 36 carrier in the audience

and suggested to the Flushing president that he be put out of the meeting because he was a "radical." The branch president, accompanied by the sergeant-at-arms, approached the GPO carrier and asked what he was doing at the meeting. He replied that he had been invited by an officer and some union delegates of the Branch to speak on what had transpired at the Branch 36 meeting, and about the strike vote set for the next day. When the officer and delegates confirmed the invitation, the branch president told the carrier he could remain in the meeting hall but that he would not be allowed to address the membership. Although he did not speak directly to the chairman or body at any time during the meeting, the Branch 36 carrier was able to indirectly influence the discussion period enough to clarify what had taken place at the Branch 36 meeting. This was accomplished by feeding questions and data through supportive carriers in the audience. Before the Flushing meeting had concluded, the branch committed itself to support whatever action Branch 36 would decide upon the next evening. Further, the Flushing carriers voted to strike on their own on April 1, if the 5.4 percent pay raise was not passed. Representatives from the Flushing clerks' union were at the meeting and they promised to fully support any action taken by the Flushing carriers as did the Brooklyn carriers' leader.

One of the key questions put to the Branch 41 president that night was, "If Branch 36 votes 'yes' on Tuesday,

does that mean there will be a strike as of Wednesday?" The Brooklyn leader's reply contradicted what the Branch 36 leadership and union delegates were telling their membership. "No," he replied. "Of course, a few days will be needed to put everything in motion." He did not realize it at the time but his response would become a rallying cry for carriers seeking a 'yes' vote from people afraid to strike. It appeared if Branch 36 carriers voted to strike on the following day, they would continue working until April 1, waiting for Congress to pass a pay raise and then if nothing was forthcoming by that date, a strike by Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn and Flushing would commence.

At the close of the Flushing meeting the Branch 36 carrier approached the Branch 41 president who was still on the stage with the Flushing officials. The Brooklyn leader admitted to the legitimacy of the Branch 36 carrier and could not defend the actions of the Branch 36 leadership. The GPO carrier was then introduced to the president and vice president of the Flushing local by a member of the executive board who vouched for the integrity and character of the man whom he had known for more than twenty years. The image of "radical" presented earlier was dispelled. The Flushing leaders, somewhat in awe of the Brooklyn and Branch 36 presidents, because of their full time union positions and their membership on the national executive board, were visibly affected by the facts laid bare concerning the

officials' positions on the issues. Beginning with this meeting and continuing throughout the strike, the leaders of the Flushing branch utilized this Branch 36 carrier as their major source of communication concerning the conflict.

One strike vote strategy:
vote yes but continue working

On Tuesday morning, rank and file carriers were called at their stations and told of what had transpired in Flushing the previous night. They were asked to contact key men in as many stations as possible. The membership was to be informed of the Flushing support; of the strike action that Flushing and Brooklyn planned to take on April 1; and of the Branch 41 president's statement that the strike would not be immediate. This last point was a stumbling block for carriers who did not want to vote strike without a program in place. Those calling for a 'yes' vote were convinced that it would be a step in the right direction while a 'no' vote would probably reduce any possibility for a pay raise or improved benefits. In order to unify the membership while bringing about a 'yes' vote, the rank and file activists developed a strategy exemplified by the call to: "Vote yes, but come to work!"

The incumbent and emergent
leaders clash at GPO

At lunch break on Tuesday, March 17, many stations held

locker-room meetings. At the General Post Office in Manhattan the union delegate at first refused to convene the meeting. When it became obvious that the carriers were going to meet with or without him, he decided to attend. He had spent the time before lunch feverishly petitioning for a 'no' vote. Only two of the seventy-five members of the Branch 36 executive board were pushing for a 'yes' vote. At noon the GPO locker room was overflowing, and as the delegate called the meeting to order, he immediately branded any reports of support from Flushing as "lies, rumors from radicals and troublemakers." He claimed to have been in contact with the Branch 36 leadership who knew nothing of the Flushing meeting, but he insisted that a 'yes' vote would bring an immediate strike at 12:01 A.M. Wednesday morning. He denounced "troublemakers" and campaigned for a 'no' vote until the GPO carrier who had been at the Flushing meeting asked permission to speak, and said that he might be able to clarify some issues because he had been present at the meeting in Queens. The delegate stated that it was his meeting and the man had no right to speak, but cries rose up from the carriers: "Let him speak. He's a member. What are you afraid of?" The carrier was permitted to speak. Although constantly interrupted by shouts of "liar" from the delegate, he reported on the points and promises made at the Flushing meeting. In an attempt to resolve the disagreement between himself and the union delegate

concerning the Flushing meeting, the carrier suggested that the carriers could find the truth by calling the Flushing branch themselves. A few of the most senior carriers did just that. After they confirmed the report of the rank and file spokesman, the locker room became the scene of much discussion. The meeting adjourned with an overwhelming feeling among the men to vote 'yes,' but come to work. Many who had previously advocated a 'no' vote would now vote 'yes' because they believed they could continue working until a program was forced out of their union leadership. For many, the 'yes' vote was less a strike vote than it was a vote mandating their local union to put pressure on the national office to obtain a decent pay and benefit program. Further, a 'yes' vote would alert the Post Office Department, the Congress and the Nixon Administration to the fact that the letter carriers meant business.

Disagreement among the informal leaders

For some members of Branch 36, the gathering at Manhattan Center that evening would be not for a vote, but for a meeting, as was stated in the motion passed by the membership. A small group of these concerned carriers met near Manhattan Center a few hours before the vote was scheduled to begin to draw up a program that could be presented to the membership for a vote which did not call for strike, but for organization and publication of legitimate griev-

ances. Their ultimate goal was for a change of leadership. The GPO carrier who had been invited to attend the meeting at the restaurant where he met most of these men for the first time, disagreed with their strategy, and voiced the opinion that there would be no meeting, only a vote and that all energies should be directed toward getting the carriers to vote 'yes.' The spokesman for the group argued that indeed there would be a meeting because he "would make sure there would be a meeting and would not allow a vote without one." He also advised that even if it were true, and no meeting took place, the carriers if they vote 'yes' will more than ever need a program. "In that case," the GPO carrier replied, "You make up a program, while I get the carriers to vote strike! After the vote, I'll see you about a program." As the GPO carrier was leaving the restaurant the spokesman turned to the group and stated, "He's a radical." One of the men, the only union delegate in the group, replied, "I don't care what he is, he's right," and left to join the GPO man. The GPO carrier asked if many stations knew about the Flushing meeting. The union delegate answered that he had contacted trusted men in more than a dozen stations himself. Some of these were the largest post offices in Manhattan and the Bronx. "How did you come by so many contacts?" inquired the carrier from GPO. "Some, like you for instance, were people I met at union meetings over the past few months. Most were carriers I've been bowling

with in the Branch 36 bowling league."

Voting in an atmosphere of
festivity, fear and
frustration

The taverns along Thirty-fourth Street near Manhattan Center were overflowing with letter carriers waiting to vote at 6:30 P.M. Most of these men had finished work between 2:30 and 4:00 P.M. The mood in the bars was particularly festive. It was St. Patrick's Day, the annual parade had just concluded and crowds of people were celebrating. These conditions seemed to make waiting much easier.

More than two thousand letter carriers were on hand when the doors to Manhattan Center opened a few minutes past 6:00 P.M. The small group of carriers who planned to conduct a meeting rather than a vote pushed past the crowd toward the stage at the front of the large hall. Quoting from the branch by-laws and the motion from the March 12 meeting, they accurately stated that a meeting would have to take place before any vote could be allowed. Unable to impress the rank and file, prevented from remaining on the stage and utilizing the microphones to convey or clarify the legality of their actions, and with no union leadership present, the group's strategy seemed doomed to failure. In a last ditch effort to prevent the strike vote these rank and file carriers positioned themselves in front of the voting machines.. Within minutes they were ushered away by uniform-

ed guards.

By 7:00 P.M. only 250 carriers had voted. Each carrier's credentials were being carefully checked and only five voting machines were available. The conditions the carriers had to endure in order to vote were gruelling. Men were practically standing on each other. The hall was crowded and hot. The lines were undisciplined allowing late arrivals to vote before some who had stood for hours. The ordeal proved too much for many carriers. More than one thousand would leave without voting. In all, approximately four thousand postal workers gathered at Manhattan Center between 6:00-9:00 P.M. Perhaps 150 were carriers or clerks from other locals who had come to observe the vote and report the results to their respective memberships. In spite of the adverse conditions and high pitch of emotions not one altercation took place.

The voting process gradually speeded up. A sixth voting machine was brought in at about 8:00 P.M. By 8:30 P.M. approximately five hundred carriers remained on the voting line. The Branch 36 president arrived at the hall amid a chorus of boos at about 8:15 P.M. He briefly addressed the crowd, telling them he was there "first to vote as a letter carrier and second to lead in whatever action is mandated." He was so visibly shaken that he was unable to hold a cigarette in his trembling hand and his usually booming voice was barely audible. As he spoke, the carriers

chanted, "Strike! Strike! Strike!"

Results of the balloting:
the call to strike

The doors to Manhattan Center were closed at 9:00 P.M. while voting continued until 9:55 P.M. The total ballots cast numbered 2,697. At 10:30 P.M. approximately one thousand postal workers were in the hall. Many were drinking beer and were quite vocal. It seemed that those that remained were overwhelmingly in favor of strike. The results were tabulated by the Honest Ballot Association. As the figures were recorded for each machine the carriers stood by silently. The branch president was now on the stage still appearing quite nervous. He was soon joined by other Branch 36 officials, the Brooklyn letter carriers' president and the president and some officers from the clerks union, MBPU. As each machine's total was broadcast, the crowd cheered the 'yes' advantage while booing the 'no' totals. Each machine had a majority of 'yes' votes, but it was not until the sixth and final machine totals were announced that the vote to strike was confirmed. The final tabulation was 1,555 to strike and 1,055 not to strike, with eighty-nine ballots declared ineligible. Pandemonium broke loose! Shreds of paper were thrown as confetti. Men were laughing, shouting, yelling, crying and hugging each other. The branch president, microphone in hand, addressed the carriers with a force he had not previously displayed. He seemed in

total command as he declared, "There will be no mail delivered beginning at 12:01 A.M. March 18." He stated that he was putting together a complete strike program, which included instructions for picketing. He announced that the station delegates would serve as picket captains. The Branch president outlined the demands the carriers expected before they would return to work. These conditions included a 14 percent pay raise retroactive to October, full payment of health benefits, top pay after three years, and an improved retirement plan. This program announced by the Branch president had been authored by the group of carriers who earlier in the evening had attempted to prevent the strike vote. The crowd cheered wildly as the president concluded with a promise that he would lead the strike and that it would be successful.

Critical and immediate support
from the clerks and the
Brooklyn carriers

The cheering continued as the president of the Brooklyn letter carriers immediately pledged his members' total support. The president of MBPU stated that he would take a strike vote of his members within the week, and his announcement received boos and catcalls. As the MBPU president attempted to leave the stage he was rushed by a group of carriers and clerks who were shouting "You better go on strike too" and "let's kill him." Some of the MBPU officers pushed

him back toward the stage advising that he declare full support of the letter carriers. Haltingly, the clerk president announced that no member of MBPU would cross the carriers' picket lines. This brought a mixture of boos and cheers. While it was not the full commitment the carriers wanted, it was enough to allow the MBPU president to leave Manhattan Center in one piece. In fact, the support of the MBPU delegates and the honoring of the carrier picket lines by the MBPU members would prove invaluable during the strike.

The carriers emptied out of Manhattan Center at about 11:30 P.M. They appeared possessed of an arrogance and pride as they answered questions about the strike from policemen and pedestrians. Two carriers were hugging each other and both were crying. "Now you can stay. You won't have to quit this job. Everything's going to be all right."

Summary

The anomie which engulfed postal workers in the 1960s was a result of the rapid and extensive changes which occurred throughout their culture and work environment. Postal workers perceived themselves as experiencing declining status, downward mobility and relative deprivation. When their job security appeared endangered by the proposals for postal reform, they subsequently began to exhibit what, for them, was unusual behavior. With an increasing number of apparent-

ly successful strikes in the public sector as an inducement, the postal workers began moving in a similar direction.

After their petitions, demonstrations, and job actions failed to obtain a redress of grievances, they perceived their plight as necessitating more intensive confrontation. Broken promises of the President, and increasing doubt concerning their union leadership heightened by industrial versus craft divisiveness, increased the alienation of the letter carriers and moved them ever closer to confrontation with existing authorities. As the legitimacy of these authorities declined, the likelihood of conflict increased. A vacuum created by a cautious and hesitant union leadership was filled by the emergent and informal leaders drawn from the membership's rank and file. These ad-hoc leaders, most younger and not as security conscious as the senior workers, articulated the feelings of the majority and wanted to transform the discontent into collective action. The spread of the informal networks of communication and organization to surrounding areas, primarily through established social ties, added confidence to those espousing collective action. The letter carriers overcame many obstacles including those placed by the government, a prudent union leadership, their own fears and the omnipresent Postal Inspection Service, to ultimately vote to strike in violation of existing federal law. The exultation exhibited by many of

the postal workers as they heard the results of the strike vote was a reaction to the release of many years of pent-up frustration. Whether or not this mood would remain, once a strike actually began, was not certain. Another question concerned the role of the formal union leadership. Would they assume control of the strike as they had announced at the conclusion of the balloting? Of key importance to the outcome of this unprecedented conflict would be the amount of support the strikers could generate within the postal community as well as the reaction and impact which the agencies of social control would invoke towards this apparent rebellion. These issues will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE STRIKE

The strike begins

Picket lines were set up outside the Grand Central post office at 12:01 A.M. This action by a handful of carriers and two MBPU members was primarily symbolic. Almost all of the Tour I postal employees were already inside the stations and would continue to work until their tour was complete at 8:00 or 9:00 A.M. At the General Post Office, officers and delegates of MBPU were busily spreading the word of the strike among their members. Focus was on Tour II which began with the carriers at 6:00 A.M. and a majority of clerks and mailhandlers between 7:00-8:00 A.M.

The Tour I employees were not asked to leave their work stations but to join the picket lines when their tours ended. Everyone agreed the strike would succeed or fail when the Tour II employees arrived. The General Post Office on Thirty-third Street in Manhattan would undoubtedly be the focal point of the strike. It was the largest post office, encompassing two entire square city blocks, handled the largest volume of mail, employed 10,729 postal workers, and was the headquarters for local as well as regional postal management. With its imposing Roman columns and its massive steps,

the General Post Office loomed as an ominous but appropriate battleground for the historic conflict about to unfold.

The letter carriers began assembling at 5:00 A.M. The union delegates took charge of the picket lines and dispatched carriers to entrances on all sides of the building. Many hastily fashioned handmade signs which they carried or strung around their necks merely said, "Strike," "On Strike," or "Post Office on Strike." Later signs became more explanative, citing specific issues such as pay, comparability, and medical and retirement benefits, some signs were written in Spanish. Regardless of what the message, or where it was carried, all of the thousands of signs the striking postal workers exhibited during the strike were handmade.

By 8:00 A.M. only five of the approximately three hundred carriers assigned to Tour II at GPO had gone into work. Some had arrived at the post office, saw the picket lines and returned home. Most, however, were manning the picket lines. As the clerks and mailhandlers approached the pickets, most joined the line. Many turned and headed away from the post office, some crossed the line. On the first day of the strike about 20 percent of the clerical force assigned to GPO went into work on Tour II. As the number of picketing postal workers grew, it became increasingly clear that the strike was successful.

The motor vehicle drivers arrived at the GPO with trucks full of mail and refused to cross the picket lines, but it was agreed that since the trucks were already filled with mail, they would be kept inside the post office instead of being left out in the street. The drivers, however, almost to a man, still refused to drive the trucks. Eventually the vehicles, driven by postal supervisors, were brought inside the post office. Although people who crossed the picket lines were verbally assaulted, no attempt was made to physically prevent anyone from entering the post office.

The "moral" issue

For most of the morning a large number of people from the news media was present at the picket lines. Invariably, the first question asked of the strikers was, "do you realize you could go to jail?" The response from the postal workers was almost always the same, "we are prepared to go to jail--together." The postal employees were aware of the law they were breaking but seemed more concerned about attaining an equitable salary and benefit package than about the penalties they faced for breaking the law. Most felt that the oath they took upon employment in the Post Office Department, not to strike, was but a part of the total agreement between the individual and the government. The totality of that agreement included government's promise to pay

a comparable wage. The breaking of the law in the minds of the postal workers had not been instituted by them so much as by the government in its violation of the comparability pay statute.

The picket lines grow

A chilling rain fell throughout the first day of the strike but the line of picketing postal workers never thinned. In fact, as the day progressed the lines swelled. Adding immeasurably to the resolve of the strikers were reports of support from other locals. These reports were broadcast throughout the day and heard by the strikers on transistor radios many carried with them. The Brooklyn carriers had struck simultaneously with Branch 36 and had been joined immediately by the clerks. Both presidents of the Brooklyn clerk organizations, the National Postal Union (NPU) and the United Federation of Postal Clerks (UFPC) were heading the picket lines. Throughout the strike, the Brooklyn president of UFPC remained the most vocal and visible postal union leader. For no less than eighteen hours a day he walked the picket lines, and at times, equipped with a loud speaker, exhorted the crowd to continue support of the strike.

The clerks who were scheduled to work on Tour III began arriving at GPO an hour or two before their tours began.

The overwhelming majority joined the picket lines. Some turned away after speaking with the strikers. Only a few crossed the lines. Most of the carriers remained on the lines until 5:00 P.M. From then until midnight the clerks and mailhandlers marched around GPO. Only a handful of Tour I personnel showed up for work that evening. Two actually went into the post office, the rest joined the picket line. At about 1:00 A.M. the last pickets abandoned the lines. As far as the GPO postal workers were concerned, the first day of the strike had gone amazingly well.

The authorities react as
the strike spreads

While the first day of the strike had directly involved postal workers in Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and parts of Long Island, Staten Island, and New Jersey, it had also begun to affect a much wider area. After completing their tours of duty, postal workers in Westchester, Rockland and Orange Counties voted to join the strike. Votes were also being conducted throughout Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio. The Postmaster General, meanwhile, had ordered an embargo on all mail originating in or destined for Metropolitan New York.

At about 2:30 in the afternoon the Honorable I. B. Wyatt issued a temporary injunction which ordered all postal workers to return to work immediately and to restrain from all strike and picketing activities. The order

broadcast throughout the Metropolitan area was virtually ignored by the postal workers. Only the union leaders seemed affected by the judge's decree. For the remainder of the strike none of the Branch 36 leadership and only a few of the shop stewards would be seen near a picket line. The striking postal employees were placed in a non-pay status for the duration of the strike. The union officers were cited in the restraining order and the delegates were issued a copy of the injunction ordering them to refrain from any activities related to the strike.

The union responds

Branch 36 scheduled a meeting on Saturday, March 21, at the 369th Infantry Regiment Armory in upper Manhattan, in order to comply with the court's order. The union president, would as required by the court, "instruct" the membership to return to work. Failure to attempt to get the letter carriers back to work would constitute a "contempt of court" violation for the branch president.

Meanwhile, the national office of NALC had also instructed the Branch 36 president to terminate the strike. The NALC president also sent a telegram to each of the three hundred largest branches of the union calling them to an "emergency" meeting in Washington, D.C. on Friday, March 20, to determine what course of action the union would take. The local leaders were further advised to take no

local action before the meeting. In fact, the local leaders could do little to prevent the carriers from joining the strike. In most of the meetings where branches had voted to strike, it was in spite of the leaders' appeals to the contrary. This spontaneous reaction to, and rejection of, leadership's position by the rank and file postal workers parallels another situation involving alienation and frustration. In their analysis of urban riots Grier and Cobbs write:

They, (White America) seem to think that all the trouble is caused by a few 'extremists!' They ought to know better....They were confronted with a leaderless mob which needed no leader, every man was a leader -- They were of one mind.¹

The rank and file reacts

This singleness of mind on the part of the postal workers is further exemplified in examining the membership meeting of MBPU, which was held at a midtown Manhattan hotel about a block away from the GPO, the evening of March 18. Almost seven thousand members of the clerks' union were in attendance when the local president explained that the union by-laws required a secret ballot vote before he could actually declare a strike. He stated that a

¹William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, Black Rage (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 58.

strike vote would be held on Saturday, March 21, and suggested that the MBPU members continue to honor the carriers' picket lines. The crowd screaming "Strike! Strike! Strike!" surged toward the speaker's podium. Many with raised fists shouted down at the president from the tops of their chairs. The president repeated that the vote would be held on Saturday and reminded the crowd that the strike was thus far successful with their honoring of the picket lines. "Not enough! Not enough!" shouted the crowd. A group of mostly young black postal workers, many of whom had been on the picket line for a good part of the day and who had left the lines only to attend the meeting, started to move toward the speaker yelling, "Strike! Strike!" The president declared "meeting adjourned" and fled the podium making his way out of the hotel through the side door of a kitchen.

The strike enters the second day

The carriers once again began assembling at 5:00 A.M., outside the GPO, on Thursday, March 19, the second day of the strike. Reports from the New York Postmaster and the Postal Inspection Service indicated that the strike had virtually brought mail service to a halt in the New York area, Long Island and New Jersey. Letter carriers at Kingsbridge Station in the Bronx had also joined the strike and the other Kingsbridge postal employees were honoring their

picket lines. The Kingsbridge carriers did not strike on March 18, because they "wanted to be sure there really was a strike this time." With each report of support on the effectiveness of the strike the picketing postal workers seemed to draw new strength. The support of the public was also encouraging to the strikers. Police and sanitation men stopped and chatted with the strikers -- all voiced supportive statements. Truck drivers, bus drivers, and taxi drivers blew their horns as they passed the strikers, and many raised their hands in victory signs. Pedestrians stopped to inquire about the strike and most offered encouragement to the picketers. People who came to the post office to try to pick up their mail also seemed to sympathize with the postal employees.

Responsibility passed from
the formal to the emergent
leader

The Branch 36 delegate at GPO appeared only briefly on the picket line the second day of the strike. He had, along with other union representatives, been served with a copy of a temporary restraining order and decided he could no longer participate in the strike. From an automat near the GPO he sent word to the captain of the softball team, the letter carrier who had spoken at the branch meeting, that he wanted to meet with him. In front of some of the most senior carriers from GPO, the delegate asked the young

carrier to take charge of the strike. These two men who had nothing but criticism for each other up to this point, put their differences aside in this time of crisis. The junior routeman accepted the responsibility, shook hands with the delegate then returned to the picket line.

The third day: attempts
to resolve rapidly spread-
ing conflict

By Friday, the strike had spread to cities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Colorado and California. Attempts were being made to institute negotiations between the Secretary of Labor and the national president of the NALC. The Postmaster General and spokesmen for President Nixon were insisting that negotiations would begin only after the strikers returned to work. Twenty-six state association presidents and more than three hundred branch leaders of the NALC met with the national president in Washington, D.C. These letter carrier representatives unanimously agreed to grant full authority to the national president to take whatever action he deemed necessary "to restore postal service and to correct the economic injustices which exist in the postal service."¹

¹"Emergency Conference Resolution," The Postal Record, May 1970, pg. 14.

The national NALC president then met with the U.S. Secretary of Labor and leaders of the other six exclusive postal unions. The union leaders were advised that the government was ready to begin negotiations but would not, until all striking employees had returned to work. The NALC president returned to the assembled delegation of his union and advised them of the Secretary's offer. The delegates voted to accept the recommendation with the condition that if fruitful negotiations were not forthcoming within five days, the national president would call a nationwide strike. The delegates returned to their local organizations to convince their members to honor the agreement.

Strikers look to Nixon
for solution

The strikers in N.Y.C. were busy organizing for the meeting scheduled in the armory on the next day. Although only Branch 36 would be voting, the whole nation would be watching. While the carriers would be in the armory, the members of MBPU would be conducting their own strike vote at Manhattan Center. The feeling among the strikers was to "hold out." They believed the strike was gaining support and either negotiations would begin or a nationwide strike would ensue within five days. They felt the strike would not be allowed to go into another week and expected the President to make an announcement over the weekend. The

strikers hoped Nixon would command them to go back to work while promising to enact a pay raise and improved benefits bill. The bill, they expected, would not be equal to all their demands but would be enough to get them back to work while allowing the President to save face. Perhaps he would chide Congress, the strikers thought. Whatever he decided to say at that point would be believed and accepted by enough postal employees to end the strike. Meanwhile, all energies of the rank and file were being concentrated on voting to continue the strike. Many calls were made throughout the New York area. Carriers from surrounding branches were asked to attend the meeting to exhibit their support for prolonging the strike.

Chicago joins strike as
union's proposal is re-
jected by rank & file

While the New York letter carriers were preparing for their vote, the Chicago carriers were conducting theirs. More than half of the six thousand members of Chicago's NALC branch attended a special Friday night meeting. When the branch president proposed that the carriers continue working during the recommended five day cooling off period agreed to by the national president, he was hooted off the stage. Cries of "Strike! Strike!" welled up from the audience. At 12:01 A.M. Saturday, March 21, the Chicago postal workers joined the strike. The shut-down of the nation's

central distribution center was the first response to the national union's proposal to end the strike. Cleveland, Pittsburg, Milwaukee, San Francisco and suburban Los Angeles also voted either to begin striking or to continue strikes already in effect. Some of the union leaders, unable to convince their members to refrain from striking, resigned their union office.

Nation staggers as strike hits peak

By Saturday, March 21, the strike had reached its peak. All but the south and southwest of the United States was affected. More than 230,000 postal workers in two hundred cities were on strike. The impact of the strike was enormous. An article analyzing the first three days of the strike appeared in the Sunday edition of the Daily News.

Bills, payments, income tax returns, dividend and pay checks, stockholder proxy votes, bank statements, sales flyers, advertising brochures, credit cards, wedding announcements, invitations and other forms of business and personal mail lay uncollected.

The New York Telephone Company said it was short by \$7 million worth of unpaid bills a day; Consolidated Edison put its own figure at \$3 million.

Millions of dollars worth of state and city taxes, due Friday, were not paid, and the deadline had to be extended. Richard E. Stewart, New York State Superintendent of Insurance, announced that during the strike and "for a reasonable time thereafter," policies were not to be cancelled if premiums failed to arrive on time.

The Defense Department estimated Friday that more than 500 tons of mail destined for servicemen and their families around the world already had been affected by the strike. Hit hardest in terms of human emotion were the families of G. I.'s in Vietnam.

Brokerage houses, banks, law offices, department stores and thousands of businesses, large and small and of every variety, were quick to feel the strike's sting. On Wall Street, there was fear that the entire securities industry might have to shut down if the walkout continued. Checks, stock certificates, bonds and other financial papers were affected, and millions of dollars in checks from investors to pay for stocks piled up in post offices.

Some banks were said to be considering early cut backs in their part time help because so much of their work involved mail. Bankers found problems arising from a breakdown in deliveries to post office boxes. An average of \$300 million a day in payments is normally directed into the city from all over the country.

The garment industry faced a crisis, being unable to receive orders for Easter clothes.

Books and magazines piled up, ...¹

Also stuck or delayed were theatre and travel tickets, draft notices, and U.S. census forms.

The striking postal workers were encouraged by the effect they were having on the nation. The troubles the strike was bringing to the banks, telephone and utility companies was interpreted as a "good sign." The strikers felt that the more pressure they put on "big business," the more likely it was that business would pressure the government to equitably resolve the dispute. The postal workers, more likely to be on the paying rather than the receiving end of the types of financial transactions halted by the strike, viewed the disruption in business as a "grace-period," or as one striking letter carrier stated, "a chance to 'sock' it to the big shots who are always socking it to us."

¹"Postal Walkout: Finally, the Inconceivable Strike," Daily News, March 22, 1970, p. 37.

the chance to 'sock it to the "big-shots" who are always 'socking - it to us'."

Strike threatens to spread
beyond postal environment

The strike threatened to engulf other federal workers. Members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Association (PATCO) in Atlanta, Georgia contacted the Atlanta postal unions and promised to "cooperate" with the postal workers if they joined the strike. The Atlanta postal employees had no intention of striking and, therefore, rebuffed the controllers' offer. Before the postal strike ended, the controllers would stage a national "sickcall" slowdown which created massive tie-ups in air travel. Attorney F. Lee Bailey, then PATCO's executive director was threatening a nationwide strike on March 26. Although the Atlanta postal workers never struck, more than two thousand city employees, members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, began a strike on March 17, which lasted well beyond the postal strike. At one point in the strike, the Atlanta fire fighters' and teachers' unions threatened to join in a city-wide public employees strike.

In his book, Strike, Jeremy Brecher cites the effect the postal strike was having on other federal workers:

..., the strike seemed on the verge of spreading to other government employees. John Griner, head of the American Federation of Government Employees, reported that he had to intervene personally to prevent several strikes by

his locals. Nathan Solkomer, head of the National Federation of Federal Employees, said that N.F.F.E. locals throughout the country had indicated that they wanted to strike in support of the postal workers. "There's no doubt that our members are in complete sympathy with the postal workers. The strike definitely could spread throughout the Federal service." Alan Whitney, vice president of the National Association of Government Employees, reported that "tremendous pressure" was being put on the union to authorize strikes, especially in "one of our biggest locals whose primary duty is to supply our war effort in Southeast Asia." Whitney added, "We have been receiving phone calls from our various local presidents in various agencies throughout the government and throughout the country. They have watched events of the past days and have seen postal workers striking with a degree of impunity, and their question to us is, if they can do it, why can't we?"

The striking postal workers were to some degree aware of the impact they were having on the nation's economy. It is doubtful if any of them were aware of the effect their strike was having on other government workers. The few postal union leaders who were aware of the mood of the other federal employees intensified their efforts to end the postal strike.

Branch 36 votes to
continue strike
as supporters flock
to New York City

Almost six thousand letter carriers filed into the Harlem armory between rows of armed U.S. servicemen at 10:00 A.M., Saturday, March 21. Contingents of carriers from Queens, New Jersey, Long Island and Brooklyn were on hand to voice support for the continuance of the strike.

¹Jeremy Brecher, Strike, (Greenwich: Fawcett Premier, 1974), pp. 331, 2.

All agreed that the vote of Branch 36 would determine whether or not the strike would continue. The branch president was greeted with a deafening ovation as he took the microphone to address the crowd. He announced that he was going to read the back-to-work order he had received from the court. As the crowd grew silent, the branch president stated that he would first read a telegram from the national president which outlined the agreement reached with the Secretary of Labor. As the telegram, which implored the carriers to return to work in order to allow meaningful negotiations to begin, was read, a steady chorus of boos and catcalls emanated from the crowd. As the reading concluded a thunderous chant of "Strike! Strike! Strike!" shook the massive hall. It was a few minutes before the president could once again be heard over the crowd. Commanding their attention, the president presented an attorney to explain the meaning of the back-to-work order. The attorney could hardly be heard amidst the catcalls, whistles and boos. The branch president shouted, "these are not my words," and read the back-to-work order. Before he could finish, the crowd began to scream, "Strike! Strike!" and then, "Vote! Vote! Vote!" The vote was but a formality. The branch president declared loud and clear that he would continue to lead in their struggle. He also denounced the string of broken promises from Washington and "begged" President Nixon to favorably resolve the crisis.

The carriers marched out of the armory to the cheers of the visiting contingents of postal workers stationed outside. Many walked through the streets of Harlem toward their respective post offices where they would resume picket duty. As the carriers, some in uniform, passed groups of people throughout the community, victory signs were exchanged with many. At more than one street corner cheers and applause rang out.

Nixon vows to move the
mails as strike is in
fourth day

When the results of the carriers' vote was announced at Manhattan Center, a loud cheer was raised. The members of MBPU who were there to vote on the strike issue themselves, had not been officially on strike but only honoring the carriers' picket lines. The result of the balloting lasted from 6:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. and was almost ten to one in favor of strike. When the figures were announced a little before 11:00 P.M., the five hundred clerks in attendance conducted a symbolic march around the General Post Office. The fourth day of the strike ended with President Nixon vowing to "move the mails" if the strike continued into Monday, March 23. Speculation was that the President was considering use of the military to break the strike. Meanwhile, postal workers appeared more unified and determined than ever. Carriers in Albany and Rochester, New York had voted to join the strike, while carriers in Minneapolis

had overwhelmingly voted to continue the walkout.

The fifth day: speculation
that the military would be
activated

Early Sunday, national NALC President Rademacher assured the Postmaster General that carriers in Washington, D.C. would definitely remain on the job. Rademacher was hopeful that enough carriers would return to work by Monday to enable negotiations to begin. At the GPO in Manhattan, only a dozen or so people were picketing. All across the country, branches were preparing to meet later in the day to vote on whether or not the strike would continue. Postal workers, particularly the letter carriers, were eagerly anticipating the scheduled appearance that afternoon of the national NALC president on a nationwide television interview show. The news media was increasingly suggesting that President Nixon would declare on Monday, either that the strike had ended, or that he was activating the military to move the mail. Stories concerning the use of troops in labor disputes appeared in much of the media. While the military had been called upon in a number of strikes in American history, never had they been activated against other federal employees. Even during the Pullman Strike of 1894, when President Cleveland sent troops to break the strike because "mail service was being disrupted," the military personnel did not replace the strikers. They

were there only to protect the mail. While the military had replaced strikers in private industry, specifically longshore, trucking, railroad and lumber, only one instance of public sector takeover had been recorded. This occurred in 1944, at the Los Angeles Water and Power System. An attempt to have the military take control of the struck Philadelphia transit system in August of that year was aborted when the strike collapsed as five thousand soldiers activated by President Roosevelt were en route to the city. In 1968, the mayor of N.Y.C. had been unsuccessful in his attempt to have the governor send in the National Guard to collect garbage during the sanitation strike. The postal employees in New York did not expect the President to send in troops to sort and deliver mail. They were convinced that even if activated, the military would be unable to actually move any more than a few pieces of post.

National union president
denounces strikers

James H. Rademacher, national president of the NALC appeared quite nervous as he was being interviewed on CBS television the afternoon of March 22. Responding to a question concerning the start of the strike, Rademacher stated that the walkout had been started by revolutionaries, militants, radical members of the Students for Democratic Society (SDS). This radical leftwing group had

been receiving much publicity for its involvement in disruptions at various colleges and political gatherings, most notably the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. This gross misstatement of fact by the national president served to strengthen the resolve of the striking letter carriers in N.Y.C. who were appalled and incensed by what they considered an insult to their struggle for rights and benefits. The "red-baiting" by the national president would not be forgotten nor forgiven by the N.Y. letter carriers and the effects of Rademacher's statement would continue long past the strike. In other parts of the country, however, the disparaging denouncements from the national president did have a chilling effect on the heated passions of postal workers.

The "red-baiting" spreads

In Chicago, U.S. Sen. Gale McGee was issuing similar statements to the media. In Eugene, Oregon, Sen. Mark Hatfield addressed postal workers at their work stations, advising them of the "radicals" take-over of the N.Y. union. Rep. Glenn Cunningham, a senior member of the House Post Office Committee issued a statement to the Omaha letter carriers notifying them of the "many SDS members among N.Y.C. postal workers." Each of these political figures was a well known, respected and long time supporter of legislation favorable to postal employees. Their stature

and statements undoubtedly had an effect on the postal workers they addressed. In Washington, D.C. another kind of pressure was applied. Local and national union leaders were advised that not only would they be subject to legal sanctions if they participated in the strike, but they and their family members would be subject to socio-economic sanctions as well. They were advised that employment opportunities, sponsorships and social interactions would be severely limited.

The strike trend is reversed

Early Sunday, March 22, the first crack in the strike emerged. In Pittsburgh, 257 of the 376 clerks scheduled for duty on Tour II reported for work. At a midday meeting, letter carriers in Trenton, New Jersey, voted to return to work on Monday March 23. In Chicago, the letter carriers executive board voted unanimously to return to work on March 23. In Baltimore, the carriers voted to remain on the job. Buffalo letter carriers, in a close vote, decided to return to work on Monday, but only for five days, pending the outcome of negotiations. Carriers in Cincinnati, almost unanimously, voted to end their strike on Monday, subject to the five day negotiations proposal of the national president. In Ocean and Monmouth Counties in New Jersey, letter carriers voted to continue striking but also offered to return on April 3, for one day

only, to sort and deliver social security and welfare checks.

Some cities remain firm
as strike continues

At an afternoon meeting of the Brooklyn NALC branch more than 85 percent of the total membership of thirty-five hundred letter carriers jammed the grand ballroom of the St. George Hotel. The branch president, attempted to explain the back-to-work proposal of the national president. The crowd put forth resounding boos every time Rademacher's name was mentioned. The local leader announced that an injunction had been issued against the branch. Again the crowd booed. Any suggestion of a return to work was hooted down. Finally, the branch president asked for a vote on whether or not the carriers would return to work. A unanimous acclamation to continue the strike was delivered by the carriers. Overwhelming votes in favor of prolonging the walkout were also registered in Flushing, N.Y., Detroit, Philadelphia, Newark and St. Paul. While only a scattering of letter carrier locals had voted to return to work, an increasing number of postal clerks and mailhandlers were reporting for duty in Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, California and Illinois. By midnight Sunday, significant numbers of clerks had reported for duty on Tour I in Chicago, Boston and San Francisco.

Rank and file
leader profiled on
national television

The NALC president was not the only carrier representative to appear on nationwide television that Sunday. A few hours after Rademacher's interview, CBS broadcast a ten minute profile of a striking letter carrier. The carrier, a Branch 36 member and union delegate, was shown at home and on the way to church with his wife and five children. His status as a U.S. Navy veteran was emphasized and he was afforded an opportunity to explain the plight of a letter carrier trying to raise a family in New York City on seven thousand dollars a year. The carrier was articulate and projected a very positive image of letter carriers. This was no radical or SDS member, yet he was a union activist very much involved in activities related to the strike. In fact, he was one of the group of seven carriers who had been planning to oust the incumbent branch leadership. Whether or not his "all American" image projected on national television could overcome the "radical smear" painted by the national NALC president remained to be seen. Postal workers who viewed the program felt it was an adequate and necessary expose. What effect the broadcast would have on the strike, now straining to sustain its intensity, remained to be seen. Striking postal workers in New York City, particularly those who

knew the profiled carrier, viewed the program as sorely needed and much appreciated support.

The sixth day: striking
carriers incensed by
"betrayal" of national
president

Monday, March 23, the sixth day of the strike, found the picket lines humming with comments concerning Rademacher's statements of the previous day. The strikers were particularly offended by their national president's reference to them as being led by members of SDS. The carriers considered SDS a Communist organization. As the ever present media people questioned the strikers about the SDS charge, the anger and hurt of the carriers was evident. "We're veterans of World War II, Korea and Viet Nam; how could he call us commies?" responded one carrier. Another exclaimed, "I fought in the Pacific during World War II and now my son is in Viet Nam. I'd like Rademacher to call me "commie" to my face." "We're as American as the American flag," declared another striker who then added, "McCarthyism may be dead, but somebody forgot to invite Rademacher to the funeral." While most of the striking postal workers had been cautious in their statements of disagreement with Congress and the Nixon Administration, such would not be the case in their denunciation of the national NALC president. The attacks on Rademacher would, for the remainder of his postal union

career, be personal as well as political. While the inflammatory statements of the national president hurt and angered the striking letter carriers, they also seemed to strengthen their determination to continue the strike until something concrete was offered. No promise from Rademacher would be accepted by the New York letter carriers.

In a demonstration of their resolve, a few carloads of New York City strikers drove to Bridgeport, Connecticut, where carriers had voted to return to work. The New York carriers attempted to convince their Bridgeport brothers not to return to work. After failing to dissuade all but a few carriers from entering the postal facility, the New York contingent positioned itself outside the doors of the building, shouting "Scabs! Scabs! Scabs!" The Bridgeport carriers worked until almost 10:00 A.M. preparing their mail for delivery. Before leaving the post office an impromptu vote was taken. The Bridgeport carriers voted not to deliver the mail and resumed the strike. The New York City carriers picketed in unison with the Bridgeport carriers before returning to their respective stations in Manhattan and the Bronx.

Nixon declares a national
emergency as he calls on
military to break the strike

It was early afternoon and the postal workers were anxiously awaiting a nationwide TV appearance by President

Nixon. Among the letter carriers the consensus was that Nixon would call in the military to break the strike in New York City. Some felt that Rademacher's "red-baiting" statements were actually the forerunner to a purge of rank and file leaders. For many the thought of the army being mobilized against postal workers was inconceivable. Talk also focused on the possibility of a "general strike" if indeed Nixon did activate the military to break the strike. Earlier in the day, Rademacher had appeared on NBC's "Today" show where he appealed to AFL-CIO president George Meany to ask all unions to participate in a general strike if the national office of the NALC called for a nationwide postal strike.

It was a little after 2:00 P.M. when President Nixon appeared on nationwide television. Citing the issue as one of survival of government based on law, Nixon declared a national emergency. He acknowledged the legitimate grievances of the postal workers and agreed that they were underpaid. He repeated the Administration's willingness to negotiate but only after the strikers were back on the job. Nixon charged the strikers with acting against the postal service, their national union leadership, Federal court orders, and their oath of office. He declared that he would meet his constitutional responsibility to see that the law was faithfully executed and that essential services were maintained. In order to achieve those

ends President Nixon issued an Executive Order, required to federalize National Guard troops, and a proclamation, which is the requirement for calling up the military reserve units. Singling out N.Y.C. as the most troublesome spot, Nixon directed the military to begin its strike-breaking activities there. A total of thirty thousand troops were immediately activated and dispatched to training centers and armories in the New York City area.

Reaction to Nixon's declaration

Reaction to Nixon's decision to use troops to move the mail was immediate, varied and widespread. Within minutes of Nixon's pronouncement, the NALC president appeared on nationwide TV urging all letter carriers to return to work immediately. George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO deplored Nixon's actions but also urged the postal employees to return to work. Mayor John Lindsay of New York City and N. Y. Gov. Nelson Rockefeller referred to the dispute as a "federal matter." Sen. Jacob Javits called the President's action "regrettable but necessary." Labor union leaders were unanimous in denouncing the use of troops to break the strike but only N.Y. District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) went beyond verbal support of the strikers. D.C. 37 President Victor Gotbaum, called a press conference and declared that

postal workers were fighting for all public sector employees. He criticized Nixon's use of the military, called on all union leaders to support the strikers and announced that D.C. 37 was contributing five thousand dollars to the strike. The longshoremen's support was not as publicized but, in fact, was more potent. When the longshoremen learned that Pier 56 on Manhattan's west-side had been obtained for the purpose of parking the army buses, the ILA threatened to declare a work stoppage. The Department of Defense and the postal service officials decided against risking that kind of confrontation and ordered the buses parked instead on government property at the Brooklyn Army Terminal. In Newark, New Jersey, black leader Leroi Jones, met with the postmaster and warned that black militants would involve themselves in the conflict if any troops were called into Newark.

Strikers are shocked
but unswayed

On the picket lines outside the GPO in Manhattan, the postal workers expressed shock and disappointment in regard to Nixon's decision to send troops to move the mail. CBS was interviewing at random but receiving almost identical responses from the strikers. "It's a sad day for America when it has to send its army against its own citizens, most of whom are veterans," offered one carrier. Another stated, "this is not a solution, it's a reaction, and

only makes things worse. Maybe now there will be a general strike." While the media was conducting its interviews, most of the striking carriers had sought the opinion of the strike captain. Among the leaders the consensus was that the decision to send troops was more symbolic than substantial. They believed the military would not be able to move much mail and if they held out for a few more days this would become apparent. "Business wants the mail, not the military," declared the strike captain. "If we can stay out for two more days, they either have to negotiate or Rademacher must call a nationwide strike. If we go back now all we have for all our efforts are promises from Nixon and Rademacher, and you all know their record on promises." The strikers returned to picket duty determined to continue their walkout until something substantial was offered.

At a meeting in Nassau County, Long Island, letter carriers not only voted to continue their strike but also decided to institute a telegram campaign urging the national president and vice president of the NALC to resign. The afternoon meeting in Nassau was followed by an evening meeting in Suffolk County. After much discussion concerning the ramifications of the military manning post offices in New York City, it was determined that the Long Island letter carriers would remain on strike in support of Branch 36 and for as long as Branch 36 stayed out.

Troops descend on New York
City as strike ends in
most of nation

NALC President Rademacher meanwhile had appealed to Nixon to delay the appearance of troops in post offices until all employees had an opportunity to return to their jobs. Although the activated military personnel began arriving in the city shortly after 6:00 P.M., it was not until midnight that any entered the postal facilities. Approximately one-half of the twenty-five hundred federal troops were dispatched to the General Post Office in Brooklyn and the Church Street Station and GPO in Manhattan. The remaining federal military personnel were housed at a military terminal in Brooklyn. The twelve hundred members of the National Guard and 15,500 reservists were ordered to assemble at specific armories and training centers no later than 6:45 A.M. Tuesday, March 24.

While the military was descending on N.Y.C., postal workers around the country were voting to return to work. By Monday night approximately sixty-five thousand strikers had gone back to their jobs. In Pittsburgh, the strike had ended. In Boston, more than 90 percent of the carriers had returned to work. In San Francisco, the carrier work force was normal. Postal workers voted to end their strike in Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin as

well as in New Haven, Bridgeport, Stanford, Norwalk and Danbury, Connecticut. Carriers in Rochester, New York and Camden, Atlantic City, and New Brunswick, New Jersey returned to work. Late Monday postal workers in Detroit began trickling into their stations.

Congress under pressure.
Courts move against local
unions

Congress was expressing increasing concern over the effect the strike was having on the country and the impending effect it was threatening on its own Easter vacation, scheduled to begin on Thursday, March 26. Sentiment was shifting toward approval of an immediate pay raise for postal workers which was not tied to postal reform. Many members of Congress had even backed off the condition that the strike would have to end before any pay increase would be approved.

Postal union officials spent much of the day responding to and/or receiving "show cause" orders. In New York City leaders of Branch 36 appeared in Federal District Court to explain why they should not be held in contempt-of-court for failing to honor the injunction previously issued by the court which ordered the union to return the strikers to their jobs. Copies of the restraining orders were served throughout the day to station delegates in Manhattan and the Bronx and to NALC officials

on Long Island. Show cause orders returnable at 10:00 A.M. on Wednesday, March 25, were issued to the Brooklyn letter carrier and clerk craft presidents.

Radical groups attempt to
attach themselves to the
conflict, some clash with
strikers

An assortment of radical political groups apparently spurred on by the President's decision to send troops to break the strike stepped up their attempts to become involved in the conflict. Up to this point in the strike the only contact any of these groups had established with the postal workers was at the March 21 mass meeting at the Harlem armory, when a small group attempting to distribute SDS type literature was quickly chased away by the letter carriers. A few times during the first few days of the strike "outside" groups had appeared at the postal picket lines handing out literature. In each instance the strikers firmly and promptly asked the distributors to leave. The closest thing to a major incident involving any of the "outsiders" occurred shortly after Nixon's announcement to send the military. A person who later identified himself as a member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), was asking strikers what they thought about the President's decision. During an interview he was conducting, the SWP member became involved in an argument with one of the strikers over the Viet Nam War. The striking

letter carrier, who had a son serving in Viet Nam, resented the SWP member's criticism of the war and reference to it as similar to the postal strike situation. After a brief shouting match the SWP member was asked to leave the area by a group of strikers. A short while later this same person, posing as a striking postal worker, was being interviewed by a local radio station. A group of strikers, alerted by the carrier the SWP member had been arguing with, seized the SWP person. As the strikers lifted him to the top of a five foot wall surrounding much of the GPO, the strike captain was alerted. He admonished the strikers and was able to prevent them from dropping the person down a thirty-foot moat. The captain explained that violence could only hurt their cause and implored the group to show real strength by ushering "troublemakers" away but only peacefully. This approach would prevail throughout the strike in spite of the radical groups' increased activities during the final days of the work stoppage.

In Ithaca, New York, the local letter carrier president turned down an offer of support from members of SDS at Cornell University and the Glad-Day Press. On Long Island, an anti-Viet Nam War group, the Long Island Moratorium Committee, scheduled a demonstration for the following day, Tuesday, March 24, in support of the strikers. In Manhattan, the Workers Student Alliance, an SDS affiliate,

scheduled a noon rally for March 25, outside the GPO. The Progressive Labor Party at Columbia University formed an ad hoc committee to support the postal strike. They planned to hold a rally at Columbia at 1:00 P.M. on March 25, to be followed by a rally at City Hall, then a march to the Church Street post office for a 3:30 P.M. demonstration. At midday, March 24, a half dozen SDS members debarked from a Volkswagen bus and began distributing literature to pedestrians and strikers. The pamphlets titled, "The Postal Workers Strike and the Viet Nam War," attempted to link the postal strike with a plethora of social and political issues. The strikers pretty much ignored the distributors but a number of pedestrians accepted the literature. Not wanting the public to associate this strike with the distributing group nor the issues in the pamphlet, the strikers asked the group to leave the area. The group crossed Eighth Avenue and continued handing out the leaflets in front of Pennsylvania Train Station and Madison Square Garden. Before the day was over a number of radical political groups appeared at the GPO with literature supporting the postal strike and linking it to their particular cause. These groups included the Spartacist League; Young Lords; Black Panthers; Progressive Labor Party; Communist Party U.S.A.; Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam; Labor Division Youth Against War and Facism; and someone carrying a sign

for "National Welfare Rights." Another group, the American Servicemen's Union, carried signs and literature directed at the military strike breakers. "Don't scab on the postal workers," was this group's main theme.

The striking postal workers perceived these groups as "outsiders" with no right to involve themselves in the conflict. The groups had not consulted with nor were they invited by the strikers. The postal workers, recently sensitized to "red-baiting" tactics, were angered and embarrassed by this intrusion which they viewed as an impediment to widespread public support and, therefore, harmful to their cause. Many felt it was a sign that the strike should end. As the strike went into its seventh day, there was much apprehension concerning the potential for violence that might involve the strikers, the military and the radical groups.

The seventh day: N.Y.
strikers increasingly
isolated

By Tuesday morning the strike was deteriorating in all but the N.Y. area. The New York Postmaster issued an appeal to the strikers which promised no punishment for workers who did not actively lead the strike if they returned to their jobs immediately. Meanwhile, the back-to-work trend had accelerated nationwide. Of the one hundred thousand employees still off the job, one-half were in the

New York City area. In some of the largest branches, NALC leaders had donned carrier uniforms and led cadres of local officials past the picket lines and into the post offices to resume work. Many of the strikers in New York City were becoming discouraged, disgusted and afraid. These feelings became more intense as news of more return-to-work votes were reported. The strike was beginning to crumble in the New York area as well. Postal workers in Newark, Elizabeth, Hackensack and Jersey City ended their strike. Clerks in White Plains, N.Y. returned to work as did carriers and clerks in Mt. Vernon, Scarsdale, New Rochelle, Harrison, Port Chester, Ossining and Mamaroneck, New York. Word passed along informal channels by the N.Y.C. strikers extolled the ranks to hold the line. "A few more days, hold out for a few more days, that's all we need."

The White House and the
courts apply pressure.
Negotiations are scheduled

In Washington, AFL-CIO president George Meany met with leaders of the postal unions and assigned one of his chief aides, James Gildea as mediator for the unions in the anticipated negotiations. Despite objections by the Postmaster General, who was insisting that negotiations would not begin until every postal worker returned to work, the Administration, through the office of the Secretary of Labor, advised the unions that negotiations would

commence at 2:00 P.M. the following day, March 25. The Postmaster General, forced to relent on his uncompromising position telegraphed an invitation to each of the postal unions to meet with him for the purpose of negotiating pay and other issues.

In N.Y.C. a federal judge was finding Branch 36 and its president guilty of contempt of the court's restraining order. The judge levied a five hundred dollar per day fine against the president which would begin on Wednesday, March 25 at 5:00 P.M. if the strike was not ended. The union, subject to the same deadline, was assessed a ten thousand dollar fine which would increase by ten thousand dollars plus the previous day's total each day the strike continued.

The military crosses the picket lines

The troops, meanwhile, had begun processing some mail. They were under special orders to avoid confrontation with the strikers. The strikers had also been asked by their leaders to refrain from demonstrating against the troops. The president of the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union had spoken to the picketing postal workers at GPO and advised them to "hold the line" and to "neither boo nor cheer the troops." In fact, there were only scattered boos from the strikers when the troops entered the post office. There were loud cheers, however, when many of the arriving military personnel flashed a "peace" or

"victory" sign to the strikers.

Postal managers protest
the presence of the
military--many join
the strikers

Postal supervision appeared more affected by the deployment of troops than did the strikers in New York City. A number of supervisors who had been reporting for work each day during the strike joined the walkout when the troops arrived. A coalition of supervisors from the Metropolitan area drafted an open letter to the Postmaster General, imploring him to end the strike. The letter, signed by fifteen officers and the legislative coordinator of the National Association of Postal Supervisors, was delivered to the New York Times where it would cover one-half a page the following day. The letter asked the Postmaster General to deliver a personal message to President Nixon. It reminded the Postmaster General that the supervisors were not on strike but were also underpaid. The letter cited the broken promises concerning comparability for postal employees. It pointed out the provision of the pay-reform bill which did not include increased pay or benefits for supervisors and insisted that the Postmaster General assure that all improvements apply to all postal employees including supervisors. The letter concluded:

And Mr. Postmaster General, the National Guard is not the answer, with all due respect.

Our people are veterans, solid community citizens, patriots. They are family people with deep convictions. They are now putting their jobs on the line, their pensions, their security. They are desperate people, provoked by promises long delayed, and promises broken.

The strike is not a defiance of the United States Government. It is an anguished call for help from people forced to desperation by the fires of frustration.

You can do it, Mr. Blount, by delivering this message. Overnight. President Nixon has made his point. The employees have made theirs.

Let one conciliatory gesture be made, and we'll all go back to work.¹

The military's attempt
to process and deliver
mail

The supervisors who did join the strikers reported that the military was, in fact, accomplishing very little in their attempt to move the mail. Most of what the troops were doing was not mail processing but moving equipment and sacks from one location to another. The bit of mail that was sorted by the military was color coded and required no skill to process. This was mail for companies which had an easily discernible return envelope in its billing process, a film developing company for example. There were no collections made so the only mail that even an attempt to sort or deliver could be made on was that mail which had been in the post office when the strike began. Because some of that mail had been prepared

¹"You Can Settle The Strike, Mr. Blount!" New York Times, 25 March 1970, p. 28.

to the point of delivery by the postal employees before they struck, the military was able to effect a token delivery to a few businesses near the post office. While the amount of mail actually processed and delivered by the military was negligible, the cost of the operation was estimated at one million dollars a day. A number of the military personnel openly fraternized with the strikers and reports of mishandled mail were common. Information concerning the activities of the troops was given to the strike captain on an almost hourly basis by postal supervisors and military personnel who were themselves strikers called to duty when their National Guard and Reserve Army units were activated.

Trusted representatives
brandish a "guaranteed
settlement" as strike
is disintegrating

While the presence of troops in post offices had little effect on either the mail or the strikers in Manhattan and the Bronx, it was a factor for other postal workers who were deciding whether or not to continue their walkout. In Flushing, it weighed heavily on the carriers who voted to return to work the next morning. The Jamaica, N.Y. letter carriers also voted to end their strike, agreeing to return to work on Thursday. At a 9:00 P.M. meeting of the Brooklyn letter carriers, the five hundred members in attendance voted to accept a proposal presented to them by

their branch president and return to work on Thursday morning. The proposal which the local president had obtained in Washington, D.C. at a meeting with the National NALC president and two New York Congressmen, promised to provide the major demands of the New York strikers. The branch president assured the carriers that the proposal was "guaranteed" and would be realized within five days or the national president would call a nationwide strike. The carriers did not put much stock in the promises of the national president but were receptive to the assurances of the two Congressmen, both trusted friends of the postal unions. An hour after the Brooklyn meeting, the same proposal was voted on by the Branch 36 Executive Board. Seventy-two of the seventy-five board members in attendance voted in favor of the proposal. The union leadership now had to convince the membership to accept the proposal. One of the dissenters argued that a meeting must be held and that branch by-laws required a three day notice for such a meeting. The local president declared that there was no time nor meeting requirement because of the urgency of the situation. He stated that he would urge acceptance of the proposal and direct the letter carriers to return to work at a news conference scheduled for Wednesday afternoon. The seventh day of the strike ended with only the rank and file postal workers in Manhattan and the Bronx not agreeing

to return to work. In Washington, the NALC president was threatening to expel Branch 36 if it failed to join the back-to-work movement.

The eighth day: rank and
file struggles to sustain
the strike

On Wednesday, March 25, the eighth day of the strike, picketers assembled in full strength at 5:00 A.M. outside Manhattan's GPO. Many calls had been made during the night to assure a strong line be set up in case the news of Flushing, Jamaica and Brooklyn deciding to discontinue striking might have caused others to lose heart and attempt to return to work. Even among those who arrived early to insure that the lines were intact expressed anger, disappointment and fear. The picketers decided to approach the situation one day at a time and adopted the slogan, "one more day--stay away." In spite of the large crowd of picketers, a trickling of postal workers entered the station. A few who would have gone in, had it not been for the lines, remained on strike after conversing with the picketers. One carrier who had not been seen since the strike began, showed up in uniform obviously intending to go to work. Spotting the strikers and their well manned lines, he turned toward home. The strikers were determined to hold the line, but more importantly, they had decided that unity must be maintained. Whatever action must be taken would be

taken together. The informal leaders repeated that theme over and over as they circulated among the strikers. While these leaders believed the strike should be sustained for at least two more days, thereby completing the week, they were aware that this was going to be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish. Some of the rank and file believed the strike had to last for at least three more days because of the three-day meeting notice required in the union by-laws and the membership mandate concerning ratification of any proposal or agreement. The rank and file leaders felt the strike had to continue in order to keep pressure on the negotiators. They thought a return to work might cause the postal officials to delay granting their demands, and free Congress to recess for its Easter vacation. The strikers also did not want to return with nothing more than promises especially from people who had a history of breaking promises. Some argued that a return to work at this point meant they were back where they started--minus eight days pay. The rank and file leaders were also fearful of reprisals from postal management. Any hope that the national president was going to call a nationwide strike was dashed by his continuous changing of the deadline, now moved to March 30, and his threats to expel the N.Y. local from the NALC. The morale of many of the

strikers was rapidly deteriorating. As an increasing number of the picketers became aware of the back-to-work movement of even their staunchest allies, the prospect of isolation and the fear of vulnerability began to overwhelm them. The strike, even in Manhattan and the Bronx, could not continue without a new surge of support and strong formal leadership.

The formal leadership
and authority figures

Aside from the rank and file, there had been very little leadership exhibited during the strike. Many of the union delegates had abandoned the picket lines after receiving the restraining order. The president and officers of Branch 36 appeared at the picket lines only once, on their way to a meeting near GPO. The clerk leadership was much more evident during the walkout. The MBPU president would appear periodically at the picket lines where he would raise his hands in victory and urge the strikers to "hold the line." In Brooklyn, one local president spent eighteen hours every day on the picket line. The most visible formal leadership, i.e., those able to command the attention of the media, utilized their time communicating denunciations of the strikers and admonishments urging their return to work. The Congress, the President, the military, the national union, and the president of the AFL-CIO were all perceived by the strikers as forces

united in opposition to their struggle for justice.

Strike ends as union
leaders detail terms
of settlement

At approximately 2:00 P.M. almost one thousand postal workers, mostly letter carriers, crowded into the New Yorker Hotel to attend a news conference called by the president of Branch 36. The strikers expected that an agreement had been reached and they gathered to hear its terms. The president of MBPU joined the carrier president who declared that he had received assurances that agreement had been reached with postal officials in Washington to provide postal employees with benefits that included: a 12 percent pay raise retroactive to October 1969; full payment by the government of health benefit premiums; top pay after eight years (reduced from twenty-one); regional pay differences, i.e., a higher wage for the N.Y. area; collective bargaining and binding arbitration; amnesty for all strikers. The Branch 36 president over the cheers of the crowd then stated that he was declaring an end to the strike and directing the carriers to return to work. When a small group of carriers demanded a vote of the membership before ending the strike, the president replied that he was "acting without a vote because the package was so good."

An hour later, at a mass outdoor meeting on the Thirty-first Street side of GPO, the president of MBPU stood on a makeshift platform, microphone in hand, to address an estimated three thousand strikers. The MBPU president read the proposed agreement and recommended its acceptance. He reminded the strikers that if these promises were not kept within five days, the national unions were to call a nationwide strike. The throng roared its approval and the president declared that "the membership has spoken." He then urged that they immediately resume their postal work duties. The president concluded with praise for the strikers and credited them with accomplishing what everyone said could never happen.

The strike was ended. Postal employees went directly from the rally into the post office. As quickly as the postal employees returned to duty, the military was withdrawn. About 70 percent of the Tour III employees reported for duty in Manhattan and the Bronx. The carriers, most of whom were scheduled to resume work the next morning, were busy gathering their signs and strike paraphernalia outside the GPO as the last truckload of soldiers moved out of the postal facility. The military men and returning postal employees stared silently at each other for a moment. A few exchanged victory salutes. Then simultaneously both groups cheered in what seemed to be a show of mutual respect and a sigh of relief that the

strike which fostered this strange relationship was over.

Summary

While the postal strike was unique in many ways, it was also similar in many respects to other strikes throughout American history. In his book, Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, Herbert G. Gutman cites strikes in the textile and railroad industries that involved unorganized workers and workers striking despite the condemnation of their union leadership.¹ The common variable in all of these conflicts, in addition to economic hardship, was the insult to the dignity of the worker who, as an insulted man, "don't (sic) think about law and legal redress."² Another important variable present in each of these conflicts was the support the strikers received from the community. According to Gutman, it was the community attitudes toward the dispute that shaped its outcome.³ Elaborating on this theme, Gutman writes, "...the degree of public support tendered these men indicates that certain institutional and ideological factors added to the strength of the workers and temporarily, at least, weakened the power of the employers and created additional obstacles for them to surmount."⁴

¹Herbert G. Gutman, Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1977), p. 318.

²Ibid., p. 311. ³Ibid., p. 246. ⁴Ibid., p. 319.

Just as in the strikes of the 1870s which Gutman describes, the discontented postal worker, a century later, "was viewed by his fellow citizens as an individual and was not yet the stereotyped 'labor agitator,' who so often stirred an automatically negative reflex from his more fortunate observer."⁵

Because it was the letter carriers who struck first and because it is the mailman who invariably comes to mind when the public conjures up an image of the postal service, the postal strike was largely perceived as a strike of the mailmen. The strike, therefore, highlighted that special relationship existing between the citizens and their mailmen. For many Americans, the mailman represented the only visible human link between themselves and an increasingly bureaucratic government. Americans depended upon or at least looked forward to a visit from the mailman. Personal as well as business communications were received on an almost daily basis throughout a person's life. The mailman came to "know" much about a firm or a family through the type of mail they received. The letter carrier brought good news and bad news. Regardless of what else was occurring in the world on a particular day, the mailman stood as a pillar of continuity and dependability. Undoubtedly, these feelings of familiarity and dependability affected the public's view of the strike. Writing

⁵Ibid., p. 319.

about this phenomenon, Cullinan states, "During the crisis of March 1970, the majority of the American people seemed to favor the cause of the strikers. White House sources later said the mail ran about 10 to 1 in their favor."¹ Another account declared: "A Lou Harris poll taken after the strike showed that 61 percent of the public sympathized more with the demands of the postal employees than with the federal government, while 25 percent favored the government."²

The fact that the strike had such an immediate, far ranging and severe impact on the American economy cannot be denied. The fact that the strike spread so rapidly and so far and wide attests to the level of discontent and frustration that existed among postal workers. The fact that the strike was on the verge of spreading to other government agencies indicates that this discontent permeated significant segments of the federal workforce. The fact that the strike lasted eight days without formal leadership and no support from organized labor was a testimony to the resolve of the strikers and the feeling that as long as they remained united, they could persevere and ultimately triumph. It was also due to the postal workers' unwavering belief in the legitimacy of their

¹Cullinan, The United States Postal Service, p. 11.

²J. Joseph Loewenberg and Michael H. Moscow, Collective Bargaining in Government (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 196.

demands and their optimism that once their plight was made public, the authorities, particularly the federal government, personified by the President, would act to resolve their grievances.

Although the deployment of the military in the New York City post office had little direct effect on the strikers and virtually no effect on the movement of mail, it did serve to isolate the New York City strikers and frightened postal workers in other parts of the country. The same was true of the "red-baiting" of the national NALC president. While it incensed the New York strikers, it caused postal workers in certain areas to hesitate about joining the strike.

The strike, ultimately broken not by Congress, the law, the courts, the public, the President nor even the military, as much as by the lack of formal leadership, was dealt the coup de grâce by trusted representatives of the strikers. Whether or not the benefits contained in the package presented to the strikers as an inducement to end the strike would be delivered once the strike was over remained to be seen. If the package was, however, just another "broken promise" what would the reaction of the postal workers be? The strike had obviously raised a number of big questions which were still to be answered. Would this collective action, violation of federal law,

lead to benefits the postal workers had been unable to gain through legitimate channels? If so, what effect would this have on other workers in the federal sector? One also wondered if the strikers would be allowed to go unpunished. Even if the federal government chose not to prosecute, would this suffice for postal management, and the internal police force of the postal service? The next chapter will examine the effects of the strike on the Post Office Department as well as on the postal workers and their unions.

PART THREE

FROM REVOLT TO REFORM AND CONTEMPORARY

INDUSTRIAL AND LABOR RELATIONS IN

THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

CHAPTER VI

AFTERMATH OF THE STRIKE

Postal Reform

Back on the job

The letter carriers returned to their routes in GPO on Thursday, March 26, where they faced two major problems--first, a fairly high volume of mail; second, rearranging the mail misplaced by the military. The mail volume was only slightly more than usual because no one had worked at preparing the mail during the eight days of the strike, nor had anyone collected any deposited post. Further, the embargo placed on all mail for the New York Metro area on the first day of the strike had prevented a larger accumulation in the New York region. However, over the next few weeks with the embargo lifted and collections and deliveries resumed, a tremendous amount of mail would pass through the New York area post offices.

The mood of the letter carriers was particularly positive as they resumed their duties they spoke of their importance as workers and of the "dignity" they had recaptured through their strike action. They were glad to be back at work and looked forward to seeing the patrons on their

respective routes. There was a camaraderie among all the postal workers that was not evident before the strike. Carriers, clerks, mailhandlers, regulars, substitutes, floaters, all exchanged greetings in an atmosphere of collective consciousness. On their delivery routes, carriers were enthusiastically welcomed by the patrons.

Negotiations: the
promises fade

In Washington, the negotiators were agreeing to discuss wages before any other issues. The Post Office Department offered a 6 percent pay raise retroactive to January 1970. NALC President Rademacher sent a telegram advising all branches to refrain from any unauthorized action while informing them that negotiations were progressing satisfactorily. Because only the seven postal unions with exclusive national recognition were involved in the negotiations, the powerful MBPU local of the National Postal Union could not participate, leaving them virtually disenfranchised. The volatile president of MBPU, when denied admittance to the bargaining session, made vehement protests over the exclusion of both the New York local and their national union. The decision to bar MBPU and NPU was jointly agreed to by the government and the seven nationally recognized unions. The New York carriers at GPO, who were apprehensive about the negotiations and aware that another strike could begin in a few days if

bargaining collapsed, refused to work overtime to catch up with the backlog of mail.

As the negotiations dragged on, the strike threats of the letter carriers' national president became more hollow. As Rademacher's deadlines passed with no action from him in spite of the stalemated negotiations, the government hardened its position. Improvements in retirement and medical benefits were swept off the bargaining table. A provision to compress the years required to reach top pay now included a delay clause. The promised pay increases were shrinking and were again attached to postal reform, with retroactive considerations greatly reduced. The package "guaranteed" by the union leaders and trusted Congressmen had all but disappeared.

In fact, all that had occurred at the negotiations was an agreement in principle between the Post Office Department and the unions. The April 2 Memorandum of Agreement still had to be submitted to the President, who, it was expected, would approve it and forward it to Congress for implementation. The agreement called for a 6 percent wage increase retroactive to December 27, 1969; compression of the years to reach top pay from twenty-one to eight; collective bargaining and arbitration procedures comparable to those in the private sector; a jointly sponsored proposal for postal reform; and an additional 8 percent wage increase effective as of the date the pro-

posed legislation would be enacted into law. While this 8 percent raise would only be granted to postal employees, the retroactive 6 percent increase would be given to all federal workers. The question of discipline was only indirectly addressed. It was believed that the Administration did not want to agree to amnesty for the strikers because more than fifteen hundred air traffic controllers were still involved in a sick-out. While the government agreed to dismiss contempt-of-court complaints against officers of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization after they agreed to do all they could to return the controllers to their jobs, President Nixon's statement of support for the postal agreement included a reminder to the air traffic controllers that fair treatment could only be forthcoming at the bargaining table if no illegal job action was in progress. On the same day, published reports appeared regarding a tentative contract agreement between the trucking industry and the striking International Brotherhood of Teamsters offering a 27½ percent wage increase over the following three years; and fifty thousand Chicago based drivers were threatening to reject the industry's offer. With a heightened awareness, postal workers discussed each day's news events in the context of their frustrated attempts to achieve an in-the-pocket pay raise.

The carriers are restless

On April 6, while the Post Office Department and the unions were negotiating, the Senate, Post Office and Civil Service Committee unanimously agreed upon the 6 percent retroactive increase. The Senate, on April 8, by an eighty-four to one vote, moved the pay bill to the House, where on April 9, it was overwhelmingly approved. On the same day in New York more than two thousand members of Branch 36 gathered at Manhattan Center for the monthly membership meeting. As the branch president explained the status of negotiations, cries of "Strike! Strike!" emanated from what appeared to be a majority of the crowd. When one particularly vocal carrier refused to identify himself, the branch president, to prevent "radicals and non-members" from infiltrating the meeting, the boisterous carrier was dragged out of the hall by the sergeants-at-arms. The clamorous meeting continued with members favoring a strike, and leadership opposed to one. A compromise was agreed upon after much debate and a few minor scuffles on the floor when the branch president was mandated to meet with leaders of other large NALC branches in order to coordinate a nationwide strike if the carriers' original demands were not forthcoming by April 30. It was

further determined that a rank and file carrier would accompany the branch president at these meetings to report back to the membership. Letter carrier locals in Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island pledged to support any action taken by Branch 36. The executive board and delegates of MBPU met later that day at the New Yorker Hotel. The militant mood of the meeting was tempered to a "wait and see" attitude.

Clash of industrial & craft unions

On April 15, President Nixon signed the 6 percent retroactive pay bill into law. Within two days the checks would be distributed to all postal workers. That same day, MBPU distributed a notice calling for one postal union. MBPU accused the leadership of NALC and the craft unions of deliberately breaking the strike and of contriving a phony package of promises to induce the workers to return to work. MBPU called for an end to craft divisions in the postal service and claimed that it was submitting challenge for exclusive recognition as an industrial union to represent all postal workers in Manhattan and the Bronx. MBPU announced that it would immediately seek membership and dues check-off cards from 30 percent of the letter carriers in the two boroughs. In an attempt to achieve the required signatures which amounted to approximately 2,700 letter carriers, the MBPU president solicited the

assistance of informal leaders among the Branch 36 carriers. These rank and file leaders were offered vice president positions in the MBPU with responsibilities for recruiting and representing letter carriers. The carriers declined the offer in favor of working from within their own union for reform.

The union shop issue

Also appearing on April 15, was a special edition of the National Right to Work Newsletter. This publication cited compulsory unionism as the main issue in the debate over postal reform, and called the postal reform package a sell-out of postal employees' freedom of choice, and reminded readers of the Republican party's platform pledge to protect freedom of choice for federal employees. Postmaster General Blount was especially criticized for "engineering a deal" with AFL-CIO President George Meany to "subject" postal workers to be covered by the provisions of Section 7 of the 1947 Labor-Management Relations Act which guarantees the right of employees to join or not join labor organizations, while also allowing for an agreement to exist that may require union membership as a condition of employment. Meany saw the proposal as a way of surmounting the states "right-to-work" laws, and envisioned a public sector work force under the auspices of the AFL-CIO. Blount insisted that

negotiating over a union shop was not the same as endorsing one, and that postal managers would not be obligated to ever agree to such a condition. The NALC President Rademacher believed the issue was of little importance to letter carriers because more than 90 percent already belonged to the union. The issue, however, was important enough to cause a substantial number of conservative Senators and Congressmen to show their support for the postal reform plan.

Congress receives
negotiation agreement

Negotiations concluded on April 16 at a special White House ceremony where President Nixon announced the settlement and promised to sign the legislation as soon as Congress returned it to him. Present at the conference were the negotiators for the postal unions and the Post Office Department, AFL-CIO officials, including President George Meany, House Leaders Carl Albert and Gerald Ford, Postmaster General Winton Blount, Postal Committee Chairmen Dulski and McGee, and other members of the House and Senate, all of whom pledged to move as quickly as possible on the proposal. Details of the proposal were submitted to Congress in a message from President Nixon and included:

1. Conversion of the Post Office Department into an independent establishment capable of operating on a self-contained basis. To accomplish this goal, the new United States Postal Service would be allowed to borrow funds and to set its own rates, subject to congressional veto by a two-thirds vote of either House
2. A statutory framework for collective bargaining similar to that in the private sector, with binding arbitration as the final step for resolving impasses
3. No right to strike
4. Retention of full benefits under the civil service retirement system and the Veterans Preference Act
5. Compression of the steps and time required to reach top pay to no more than eight years
6. A pay increase of 8 percent upon enactment of the reorganization law
7. Postal rate increases of 33 percent for first and third-class mail and 50 percent for second-class mail
8. Removal of the Postmaster General (PMG) from the Cabinet. Instead of being appointed by the President, the PMG would be selected by nine public members of a bipartisan Commission on Postal Costs and Revenues. The Commissioners, not more than five from any one political party, would serve nine-year terms, be appointed by the President with the advice of the Senate,

and the PMG and Deputy PMG would serve as members of the Commission which would have full authority to manage the day-to-day operations of the postal service

9. A Postal Rate Board which would conduct full and fair hearings on rate change proposals
10. A pay-as-you-go policy of taxpayer subsidies for the postal service would require a 10 percent (\$800-\$850 million) subsidy the first year of reform, with a declining percentage contributed each year until the end of 1977, when it was expected the mails would be completely self-supporting. Appropriations at that time would only be considered for revenue losses related to non-profit organizations and reduced-rate groups as required by law
11. A thirteen member advisory council composed of the PMG and Deputy PMG who would serve as the chairman and vice-chairman respectively. The other eleven members would be appointed by the President. Four would represent major mail users, four would represent postal employee organizations, and three would represent the general public

President Nixon's plan for postal reform was heralded in the national press on the following day. Particular attention was given to the president of the AFL-CIO, and to his opinion of the plan.

...George Meany, president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, hailed the settlement as "one of the most significant events in the history of collective bargaining."

"We in the A.F.L.-C.I.O. quite candidly see these negotiations as setting the stage for the future. We believe that collective bargaining can be--and should be--extended to all workers in the Federal Government."¹

Opposition to the agreement

The plan, so enthusiastically welcomed by George Meany, was not well received by the N.Y.C. postal workers. MBPU called the package a "sweetheart deal" and criticized Meany for supporting it. MBPU's major objection to the reform plan concerned the determination of appropriate bargaining units. The plan called for recognition on a national craft basis only. For MBPU, members of which crossed all craft lines, this would mean not being able to negotiate on behalf of its membership, and would lead to the eventual demise of the union. Further, MBPU argued, it eliminated any possibility of one union for postal workers, perpetuated power in the hands of the incumbent national officers, and continued the domination of the rural postal workers to the detriment of the urban areas. The National Postal Union and its major affiliate MBPU argued for recognition before the American public and the

¹Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Revises Postal Plan; Calls for an 8¢ Letter Rate," New York Times (April 17, 1970), p. 18.

Congress. On April 25, the MBPU president appeared on national television. Two days later, joined by the NPU president and a representative from the National Alliance of Federal and Postal Workers, an organization comprised almost entirely of black members and limited to local recognition in only a few cities, the MBPU president testified before the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee. In his argument for recognition, he raised the question of area bargaining. On May 11, the House committee reported out the postal reform bill with a major amendment calling for wages to be reflective of regional differentials. The committee's bill further provided for continued local recognition for NPU, MBPU, and the National Alliance. No provision for postal rate increases was in the bill and only a majority vote by either house could prevent rate increases. The Senate bill was reported out of committee on May 26. The major difference between the House and Senate bills was a provision in the latter which allowed for the issue of a union shop to be negotiated in those states which did not have "right-to-work" laws. The Senate bill contained no provision for recognition of the independent postal unions.

Branch 36 members
want strike vote

While the postal reform bills were being debated in Washington, the letter carriers in N.Y.C. were once again

threatening to strike. The president of Branch 36, following the mandate of his membership, had ventured to Washington and met with leaders of more than fifty of the largest NALC branches representing approximately fifty thousand letter carriers in N.Y., New Jersey, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Texas, and California. At the meeting, he criticized the delay in enacting the pay raise and promised to lead a nationwide strike if the pay bill was not finalized by May 14. At the May membership meeting of Branch 36, however, he backed off from his strike threat, explaining that a bill would be forthcoming in a few days which would provide an 8 percent pay increase. A loud roar of disapproval came from the crowd of almost three thousand letter carriers and erupted into an almost deafening chant of "Strike! Strike! Strike!" The branch president offered a compromise resolution which called for postponement of a strike until a vote could be taken at the next branch meeting. The resolution was carried by a slight majority. Meanwhile, in Canada, postal workers were staging sit-down strikes in protest of the stalemated negotiations between their unions and the Canadian government.

National right-to-work
vs. union shop

As the June 11 membership meeting of Branch 36 drew nearer, the National Right to Work Committee stepped

up its campaign to eliminate any provision in the postal reform bill that would allow a union shop clause to be a subject for negotiations between the Postal Service and the unions. With strong backing from the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, the Right to Work Committee argued against "forced unionism," declaring, "no citizen should have to pay dues to a union in order to work for his own government." The opponents of the union shop provision were concerned about the precedent it would set for all federal workers. AFL-CIO President George Meany, sought the unionization of all federal workers, and hoped to expand the organization to the largest growth sector in the American labor force, public sector workers at the state and local levels. Paradoxically, the traditionally conservative Senate's bill contained the union-shop provision while the usually more liberal House of Representative's bill did not. One reason the Senate supported the union-shop proposal was the Administration's commitment to the AFL-CIO to support the union-shop in exchange for labor's support of postal reorganization. Two N.Y.C. postal workers were invited to Washington by the National Right to Work Committee for support against the union shop. One of the employees had worked during the strike and was opposed to forced unionization of postal employees. The other postal employee was a Branch 36 informal leader of

the rank and file letter carriers who had spoken at a press conference to back the efforts of the Right to Work Committee. He also delivered a petition in Washington to members of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee, which was to be presented before the House Rules Committee. The petition requested that the provision of Executive Order 11491 giving postal employees the right to join or not to join a union be written into any postal reform legislation, thereby expediting a just wage increase, fringe benefits, and better working conditions for all postal employees.

Violence erupts
at Branch 36

Seven hundred carriers were in attendance when Branch 36 president called the membership meeting to order at Manhattan Center at 4:00 P.M. on June 11. Many carried copies of the Daily News and an article that had appeared in a small space on the bottom of page fifty-nine earlier that day, which reported that House debate on postal reform and the pay raise had been postponed amid rumors that the bill lacked the necessary votes for passage. The branch president asked that a resolution be adopted to postpone a strike vote until July 1, when an all-day vote on the strike issue could be held, which if passed, strike action would follow on July 6. His recommendation was met by a barrage of shouts for an immediate

strike. After almost two hours of heated debate on the issue, the president called for a voice vote. Those in favor of the resolution seemed to number about as many as those opposed, but the vote was inconclusive because of the disruption caused when carriers who favored strike stamped their feet and banged their chairs up and down. The president, obviously shaken and soaked with sweat, called for a division vote. Lighting up one cigarette after another, he asked those in favor to line up on one side of the room. With the assemblage about equally divided and some members still moving about, the president declared that the resolution had passed. As a group of carriers that had not yet taken their place on either side of the hall moved toward the microphone to question the voting method and count, the president ran from the stage. A number of brief scuffles ensued as the president was hustled out of the meeting hall by a group of detectives who had accompanied him to the meeting to protect him from threats he claimed had been made on his life. As the detectives pushed aside the letter carriers to clear a path, some carriers shoved back. Others swung rolled newspapers at the fleeing president, the detectives, and some of the union officials who were following them out of the hall. While the president escaped unscathed, some members of Branch 36 were struck and knocked to the floor. In the meeting hall a rank and file letter

carrier was appealing to the members to remain calm and not to let the unity which was their strength dissolve. He called upon any carrier who was interested in preserving the union to remain in the hall to help develop a strategy to prevent such a debacle from ever happening again. "If we can't get the leaders to change, we can change the leaders," shouted the carrier, but he was using a microphone that had been disconnected.

Rank and file
strategy emerges

About forty letter carriers did remain in the meeting room to discuss the present status and future of their union. All agreed that the local and national NALC leadership was bankrupt. The carriers noted that less members had attended this branch meeting than any of the meetings since the strike, due to the disruptions and frustrations of the previous meeting. The carriers were certain that even less members would be likely to attend future meetings after reports of the day's violence spread. Some carriers suggested quitting the union, and joining MBPU, while others advocated a political movement designed to oust the incumbent leadership. After about an hour of discussion only half of the group remained, while others had left convinced that the situation was hopeless. About a dozen left after tearing up their Branch 36 membership cards. The twenty carriers that

remained moved their meeting to a restaurant across the street from Manhattan Center, where they began to construct a political action plan to unseat the branch leadership.

"Trade-offs" in
Washington

In Washington, NALC President Rademacher was threatening to call a nationwide strike of all letter carriers if the House failed to approve the postal pay increase by June 19. On June 13, George Meany, in an attempt to preserve the union-shop provision of any postal reform bill urged all members of the House of Representatives to vote against the House Committee's version of the bill. As an alternative, Meany asked the Congressmen to support a substitute bill co-sponsored by Arizona Democrat Morris K. Udall and Illinois Republican Edward J. Derwinski. The Udall-Derwinski bill, which the Nixon Administration was willing to support, would allow the union-shop issue to be a subject for negotiations between the postal service and the nationally recognized, craft-structured postal unions. The Udall-Derwinski substitute contained no provision for recognition of the independent postal unions. The trade-off proposed by Meany, as the price that would be paid for the union-shop provision, was the sacrifice of postal pay increases contained in the House committee's bill, but eliminated in the substitute bill. One of these

pay provisions involved the April 18 retroactivity date for the 8 percent salary increase, the other allowed for automatic wage adjustments the government would be required to make for postal workers as it was obliged to do for blue collar workers. Meany's pronouncement further reduced his stature among N.Y.C. postal workers.

Postal management
proposes a hard line

On Monday, June 15, as debate on the bill began in the House of Representatives, PMG Blount released a statement declaring that he would not agree to amnesty for anyone who had participated in the strike. On Wednesday, June 17, the PMG announced that he would recommend that President Nixon not sign any pay bill containing a provision for retroactivity. Debate in the House lasted for three days, and it was not until almost midnight on June 18 the House version of the postal pay bill was passed. The bill retained the April 18 retroactivity date for the 8 percent pay raise; authorized funds to finance the compression of years required to reach top pay; provided for collective bargaining with binding arbitration; permitted negotiations for area wages or cost of living differentials; protected the bargaining rights of the independent postal unions; and prohibited the right to strike and the union-shop.

Unresolved critical
issues delay passage
of postal bill

Even the success of the postal pay bill through the House brought only negative relief, with powerful opposition in the Senate yet to be overcome. On the Senate side, the postal bill had almost completely been bogged down. The Majority Leader, Democratic Senator from Montana, Mike Mansfield, stated that no legislation would be considered in the Senate until the issue of American troops in Cambodia was settled. Languishing along with the postal bill was important legislation concerning appropriations. With the fiscal year ending on June 30, a failure to act on these appropriation bills could have a severe impact on the government's business of running the country. In order to address these critical issues, the Senate consented to work overtime. The Cambodian question would be debated until 5:00 P.M. each day, when the pressing fiscal matters would be considered. Mansfield agreed that once these appropriations bills were settled attention would be focused on postal reform. With national NALC President Rademacher threatening to lead a nationwide strike "unless positive action was taken by June 30," and the New York City carriers preparing for a July 1 strike vote, the Senate, on June 29, began to debate the postal pay and reform bill. Intense pressure was mounted by the National Right to Work

Committee and the National Postal Union. The former was seeking to have the Senate remove the union-shop provision contained in its version of the bill, while the latter sought to eliminate the "national crafts only" clause for union recognition. Although neither of these issues was resolved as the clock struck twelve on the night of June 30, enough "positive action" had transpired for the letter carriers' union leaders to rescind their strike threats. In New York the scheduled strike vote of Branch 36 was called off.

What the Senate had, in fact, passed in their version of the postal bill was an 8 percent pay raise retroactive to April 18. Because both the House and Senate versions of the bill now contained the 8 percent retroactive clause, this provision would have to be included in the legislation when finally enacted.

Final approval: Nixon
signs the Postal
Reorganization Act

As the bills were being studied by a joint conference committee, it became increasingly obvious that in order to have congressional agreement on the final content of postal reform legislation, the controversial union-shop provision in the Senate's bill would have to be eliminated. On July 9, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted in favor of a resolution put forth by

Representative Henderson which mandated the House conferees to abide by the "right-to-work" position contained in the House version of the bill. On July 30, following three weeks of meetings, the conferees approved an amended version of the House Postal Bill HR 17070. On August 3, by a vote of fifty-seven to seven, the Senate passed HR 17070, as amended. Following publication of the complete bill as amended in the Congressional Record, the House of Representatives on August 6 approved the measure by a vote of 339 to 29. The bill was immediately sent to President Nixon for his signature. On August 12, 1970, at a gala ceremony at postal headquarters in Washington, D.C., Nixon signed the postal reform bill into law. The bill which became the Postal Reorganization Act, Public Law 91-375 differed only slightly from the Memorandum of Agreement signed by the Post Office Department and the seven exclusive unions on April 16. The organizational structure of the Board of Governors, Postal Rate Commission and Advisory Council as outlined in that Agreement were incorporated into the Act, as was the proposal for a self-supporting system, including the policy of tax payer subsidies. In addition, the postal service was empowered to borrow up to ten billion dollars through the issuance of bonds. The Act did not allow for area wage comparability; afforded managers' and supervisors' associations consultation rights and higher wage rates than their

subordinates, while leaving them out of the collective bargaining process; and left the determination of appropriate bargaining units under the jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Board. However, the transitional bargaining which was scheduled to start almost immediately was restricted to the seven craft unions with national exclusive recognition.

The end or only
the beginning

Thus culminated an eighteen month long political and legislative struggle in the nation's capital, which for eight fateful days in March, had become street drama outside post offices across America. For George Meany and the AFL-CIO, the post office victory offered hope to other federal workers:

We in the AFL-CIO hope to be back...in the very near future, urging adoption of a measure that will ensure genuine collective bargaining for all aspects of government employment for all civilian workers in the federal government.

We think this bill is only the beginning. We are convinced that the other federal employees also must have a right to economic self-determination and to the democracy of the collective bargaining table.

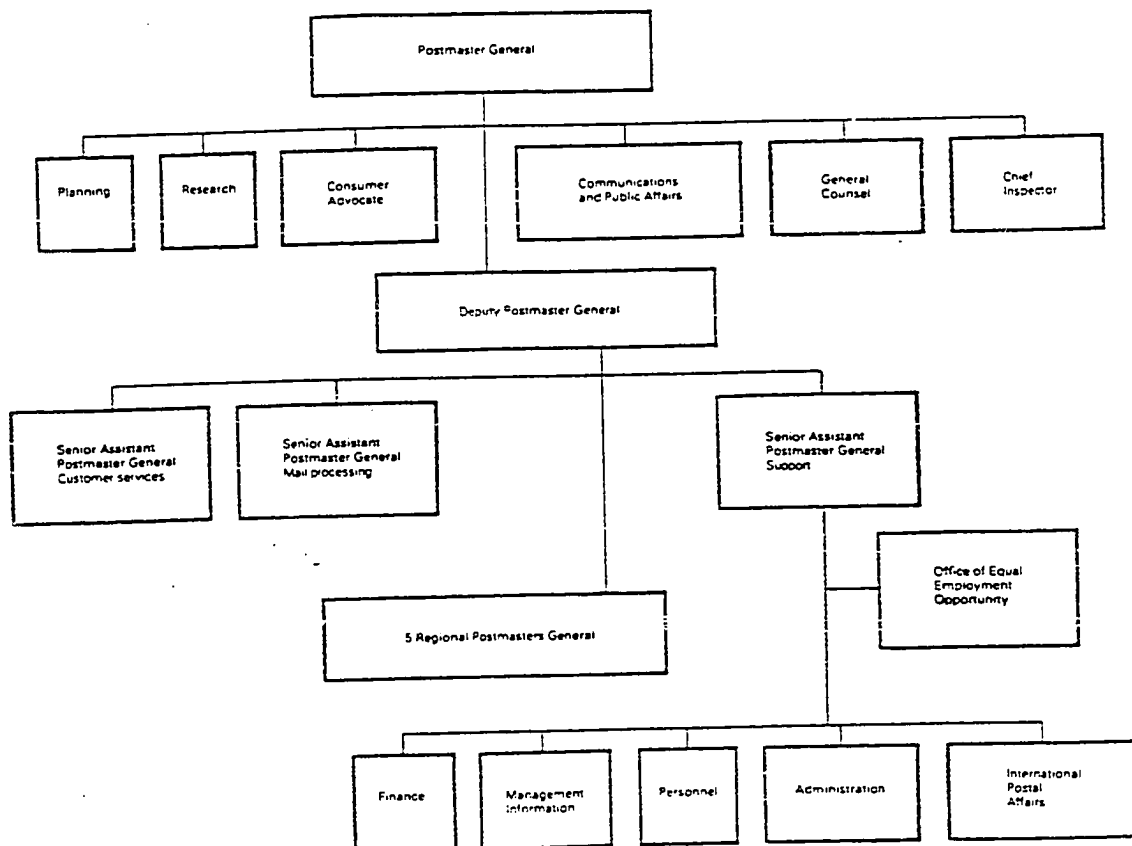
As we see it, Congress is today paving the way for a new day in federal employment relationship -- a good day, too long delayed.¹

For the letter carriers it was also the beginning of a new struggle. The battle for postal reform had highlighted

¹Murray B. Nesbitt, Labor Relations in the Federal Government Service (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, 1976), p. 344.

another area in need of reorganization. As the conflict over postal reform was winding down, the carriers were launching their campaign for union reform.

Figure 2. U.S. Postal Service, 1971



SOURCE: Nicole Woolsey Biggart, "The Creative-Destructive Process of Organizational Change: The case of the Post Office," Administrative Science Quarterly 22 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Graduate School of Business & Public Administration, Sept. 77): 416..

Union Reform

Organizing for collective action

Following the frustration and violence of the June membership meeting of Branch 36, letter carriers began meeting outside the union to discuss issues related to their work environment. The first of these meetings was held on June 19, at 3:30 P.M. in a church hall a few blocks away from the General Post Office in Manhattan. A station meeting off post office property was, as far as even the most senior carriers could remember, unprecedented. The union delegate was invited, as were all GPO carriers, but chose not to attend. Many carriers voiced fear of recrimination from the Post Office Department toward anyone participating in such an unconventional gathering. Fifty-one carriers attended the meeting which was chaired by the GPO strike captain. Every person in attendance spoke at least once during the meeting about the issues of unequal distribution of overtime, a recent management dictum that changed the carriers' lunch period from thirty minutes to one hour and delayed their quitting time, and the issue of union representation. The GPO delegate had announced that he would be retiring at the end of July, and that the union

would appoint someone to replace him. A petition was circulated appealing to the union to allow an election for delegate. Although the carriers were in agreement concerning the principle of electing a union delegate, many were cautious about signing their name. None had ever signed a petition of any sort concerning their post office or union activities. Many voiced fear of the postal inspectors, as they were convinced the meeting was being monitored by them. However, after much discussion, forty-six carriers signed the petition and agreed to influence absent GPO carriers to sign. Before the meeting was adjourned, the carriers decided to meet again on June 27, and the anxious men left the meeting doubtful about ramifications, but also feeling good about having had the opportunity to express their feelings on work related issues.

At first, carriers were reluctant to sign the petition to have a delegate election. Only twenty-five names had been added during the three days following the meeting. A week after the meeting a major breakthrough occurred when management announced that letter carriers in GPO station would be given the option of choosing either a thirty-minute or one-hour-lunch period. It was the first small victory, but it created an awareness of the power and potential of collective action among the carriers. Within two days almost one hundred signatures were added

to the petition calling for a delegate action.

Attempts to change
the branch by-laws

With postal reform and the 8 percent pay raise imminent, attendance at union meetings dropped off sharply. Only two hundred letter carriers attended the July meeting of Branch 36. However, it was at that meeting that the first political step in the campaign for union reform was taken by the rank and file carriers. Two amendments to the branch by-laws were introduced by a group of letter carriers from the General Post Office. The first would allow any carrier who had quit the union to be readmitted to membership upon application and the payment of one month's dues. This proposal, designed to attract the hundreds of letter carriers who had quit in frustration during the post-strike turmoil, if adopted, would eliminate the existing policy of up to one year's dues payment for membership reinstatement. The second by-law change proposed that all candidates seeking branch election be allotted sufficient time at the November membership meeting to present themselves and their platforms to the body for questions and/or debate. Nominations for branch office would be conducted at the October meeting and the branch election would be held in December. The proposed by-law changes were read into the minutes of the meeting and would be discussed and

voted on at the September membership meeting. There was no branch meeting scheduled for August because the union officials would be attending the NALC national convention in Hawaii.

Informal and emergent
leaders unite: the
Rank and File is formed

Four days after the branch meeting the small group of letter carriers that had been interested in the politics of the branch over the past year contacted the GPO carriers and asked if a meeting place could be secured where all carriers interested in reforming the union could join together. The GPO carriers obtained the church hall where they had been holding their "underground" station meetings. On the afternoon of July 23, sixty carriers from many stations in Manhattan and the Bronx met to express their dissatisfaction with the incumbent leadership of Branch 36. The carriers were unanimous in their denunciation of the national NALC administration. With the democratic process followed and parliamentary procedure maintained, every carrier in attendance was afforded an opportunity to express his point of view. The group adopted the name Branch 36 Rank and File and elected a communications and platform committee. All agreed that reform had to come from within the union and every effort should be made to support the

proposed by-law changes. Another meeting was scheduled for August 5.

Union delays
delegate election

On July 31, the delegate at GPO retired. On the same day the strike captain brought the petition for a delegate election to the union office. The petition which now contained two hundred signatures of members in good standing was received cordially by the executive vice president of the branch. However, he advised the carrier that the union would not allow an election before the regular branch-wide delegate elections in October. The branch delegate elections were to become a key component in the Rank and File's campaign to reform their union. Each delegate, regardless of the size of the post office he represented, had one vote on the Branch 36 executive board. At each successive meeting of the Rank and File, attempts would be made to convince carriers sympathetic to their cause to seek election as station delegate.

Rank and File distributes
"unauthorized" leaflets

On August 5, sixty-five carriers representing twelve stations in Manhattan and four in the Bronx gathered at the church hall near GPO. Discussion centered on the Rank and File platform and the upcoming

branch elections. Every carrier who volunteered was assigned to a committee. It was determined that the next meeting would be held in the Bronx, on August 27. The platform committee was meeting almost every evening trying to incorporate the grievances and desires of the carriers into a document that could be presented to the members as the basis for a viable program of reform. A meeting announcement leaflet was produced and distributed by the communications committee. All previous meetings had been advertised by word of mouth in stations or on the telephone. Postal workers were wary about distributing literature of any kind in the post office or even outside the stations if it referred in any way to postal business. Only authorized leaflets, i.e., management approved, could be posted inside post offices. This even applied to information bulletins and meeting notices from the postal unions. Distribution of "unauthorized" material was unprecedented. Even during the strike no printed matter was circulated by the postal workers. Mention was made of the charges levied against a GPO carrier for unauthorized use of a post office bulletin board after he had tacked up a notice inviting letter carriers to a softball game and picnic. The Rank and File leaflet advertising the Bronx meeting was addressed to "Letter Carriers of Branch 36" and asked if they were interested in a stronger union. It further

inquired if they were satisfied with local and national NALC leadership and if they were interested in "dumping" the local (Rademacher) controlled officers. The strategy of linking and attacking the national and local union leaders simultaneously would prove to be a successful tactic utilized throughout the campaign. The leaflet was unsigned but bore the name Branch 36 Rank and File across the bottom of the page.

Rank and File solicits
supporters and donations
in the Bronx

Eighty carriers from twelve of the twenty-two Bronx stations were in the church hall when the Rank and File meeting was called to order at 4:00 P.M. The chairman, a letter carrier from the Throgs Neck station introduced the platform committee members and explained the purpose of creating a program that could either be adopted by the incumbent leaders or serve as a platform for candidates to replace them. The meeting had barely gotten underway when three carriers became disruptive. They were each given a chance to voice their opinion but continued talking in a loud and abusive manner even when others had the floor. When it became obvious they would not comply with rules of order they were asked to quiet down or leave. Two of the carriers were quieted while the other had to be removed by a "sargeant-at-arms" appointed by the chairman, acting on a motion passed by

the body. One could not help but notice the demeanor of the Rank and File meeting as compared to disorder and indecisiveness of the Branch 36 membership meetings. Before the meeting concluded, a dozen carriers committed themselves to working with the Rank and File and two promised to run for station delegate in the October branch-wide elections. Donations were solicited for the first time and a total of sixty-five dollars was collected. It was determined that the next meeting would be on September 3, in Manhattan.

National unions consider
restructure. Incumbents
under fire at conventions

While the carriers were meeting to reorganize their union, entire unions were discussing restructure. At their respective national conventions both the National Postal Union and the United Federation of Postal Clerks endorsed the concept of one union for all postal employees. The NALC agreed to appoint a committee to study the possibility of merger and report to the next biennial convention. Although the incumbent officers of the postal unions received no more than scattered token opposition to their elected offices, their policies came under heavy attack at the national conventions. Attempts to raise the salaries of national UFPC leaders were soundly defeated. Dues increases supported by the national officers were greatly watered down and a resolution

was passed over the strong objections of the UFPC officials which authorized the calling of a nationwide strike if complete amnesty for the March walkout was not forthcoming from the postal service. At the NALC convention, President Rademacher, sensing the mood of the delegates, pledged to lead a national postal strike, if necessary, to obtain decent pay and working conditions. Both NALC and UFPC delegates rejected the concept of area wage scales. However, the NALC did allow for the possibility of salary increases based on rises in the consumer price index. This "compromise" did not satisfy the proponents of area wage because it was based on a national as opposed to a regional index. Another rebuff to the NALC leadership developed when the administration proposed a commendation for AFL-CIO President George Meany for his efforts on behalf of letter carriers and all postal workers during the strike and the post-strike negotiations. Not only was the officials' recommendation rejected, but a resolution calling for Mr. Meany to be "censured" was overwhelmingly approved by the delegates. This revolt toward reform and general dissatisfaction with national union leadership was not limited to the postal environment. At the national convention of the American Federation of Government Employees a "Committee for Progress" candidate for president, although defeated by a two and one-half to one margin, received almost seventy thousand

votes. A resolution to increase the president's salary was rejected as was a proposal to extend the term of office from two to four years. During the convention a faction emerged which proposed one union for all federal employees.

Rank and File expands and
establishes priorities

Response to the September 3 meeting of the Rank and File was such that the church hall could not accommodate the crowd. The 130 carriers moved their meeting to a settlement house auditorium on West Twenty-sixth Street. Invitations had been sent to seventy-five members of the Branch 36 Executive Board but only six delegates chose to attend. The strike captain from GPO was elected to chair the meeting. Many questions concerning the upcoming branch elections were posed by the carriers. Specifically, they wanted to know who would be running for president of Branch 36 in December. The Rank and File spokesmen explained that before a viable candidate or slate could be nominated, important prerequisites needed solutions--the passage of the proposed by-law changes which would be voted upon at the Branch 36 membership meeting the following week, and the delegate elections in October, since the delegates influenced union policy through their votes on the branch's executive board. The Rank and File platform required the support of a majority

of the membership to become branch policy, and this was more likely to occur if influence was exerted by elected representatives. As at the previous Rank and File meetings, a progress report was given by the platform committee and suggestions from the group were incorporated where appropriate. The meeting concluded with a fund raising appeal that produced about one hundred dollars for the campaign. The carriers left the hall pledging to support the by-law changes at the branch meeting. A group of Rank and File activists remained in the hall to discuss the suggestion that individuals interested in running for branch office declare themselves. Some were opposed to this idea, preferring to wait for the delegate elections. Others agreed and proposed a Rank and File convention to nominate candidates for branch office. Of the four carriers who did express an interest in a particular office, two selected the office of president and two the position of vice president. It was agreed that no further action be taken on the issue of candidates for office until after the by-law vote meeting.

The first victory: branch
by-laws changed

Almost two hundred carriers were at the September branch meeting. After an extended debate on both sides, highlighted by a senior member's appeal to allow members who had quit to be reinstated without penalty because

"they did not quit their union, rather, they were driven out," the by-law changes were passed by the required two-thirds vote, 127-60. This victory was a tremendous boost to the Rank and File. Many carriers and one union delegate came forward and offered support; some declared that they would seek election as union delegates under the banner of Rank and File, and most were recruited by the communications committee to be "distributors" of Rank and File literature. A nominations committee was selected and commissioned to conduct interviews and evaluations of individuals seeking election to branch office. In spite of opposition from a minority who were still arguing for an open convention to nominate candidates, the election committee proceeded to select a slate to run on the Rank and File ticket. It was agreed that a convention would be held to ratify the platform and to nominate and elect candidates, all of whom would have to pledge to support the platform in order to receive the endorsement of the Rank and File. However, the convention would be "open" only to the extent that the Rank and File slate, predetermined by the committee, would be presented to the members for approval. The convention date was set for October 6, which was immediately after the delegate elections. A convention committee was selected to plan for the event. The convention would be a major test of

the ability of the insurgents to engender wide-spread appeal.

Disagreement within
the Rank and File

On the night before the Rank and File convention an issue arose that threatened to split the group wide open. The nominating committee had concluded its evaluations of prospective candidates and was reporting its recommendations to a group of about twenty Rank and File carriers. While all agreed with the selections of the committee a question was raised concerning the options carriers at the convention would have regarding these candidates. The committee had decided there would be no choice other than the slate it presented. A violent disagreement erupted from a small minority who felt the convention should be "supreme," i.e., have full and final say on which individuals carried the Rank and File banner in the branch elections. The dissenters were concerned about the possibility of not having any options if a recommended candidate was rejected by the assembly. The debate concluded with only two carriers still holding out for an "open" convention. However, the two dissenters were influential figures in the Rank and File movement and, in fact, had been selected by the nominating committee for two of the branch's three full-time officer positions, executive vice president and recording secretary. At the crux of the

disagreement was the issue of a democratic, i.e., "open" vs. a "closed" convention, and the fear of the carrier selected for the presidential position that the dissenters would seek to block his nomination. At a previous meeting one of the dissenters had also declared for the position of president while the other had been elected over him as chairman of the meeting. The committee's choice for president threatened to "quit the whole thing" if he was not the Rank and File nominee for the top spot. He accused the two carriers of destroying the Rank and File and of assuring the incumbent's reelection. The dissenters, meanwhile, were concerned that the convention might not accept him. They themselves had come to accept him as a legitimate candidate only after he was elected delegate in the recent elections. Prior to that, he had been defeated in one previous attempt to become station delegate and was reluctant to try again. It was only after he was advised that he would not obtain Rank and File support for a major branch office without first being elected in his station that he entered the delegate election. The fact that he was elected by a wide margin in the largest carrier station in the world, employing six hundred carriers, greatly enhanced his candidate status. Yet, in the eyes of many he still remained a "controversial character." He was the same man who had gone to Washington in June to speak out against the

union-shop because he believed the issue was holding up the 8 percent pay raise.

The debate concerning the "open" vs. the "closed" convention concept raged on for hours. When it was clear that no agreement could be reached on the issue, the nominating committee offered a compromise. The committee would announce its recommendations and the slate would be presented as a "package" to the assembly, i.e., opposition would be allowed only if the entire slate was rejected. Nominations for individual candidates would not be accepted. The dissenting carriers vehemently disagreed with this suggestion and left the meeting without resolving the conflict. It was not until shortly before the convention was scheduled to begin that agreement was reached on this issue. The convention would be "open," and the Rank and File nominating committee would merely announce its recommendations. All positions could be contested by any member at the convention.

The Rank and File Convention

The Rank and File convention was held on October 6, at Saint Columba school in Manhattan with more than three hundred letter carriers present as news of the success of the Rank and File candidates in the delegate elections was announced. The Rank and File platform was presented to the members for ratification, including the

following planks: area representation, i.e., affiliation with the NALC but more autonomous locals; improved retirement benefits and a supplemental plan at the branch level; full payment of medical premiums by the postal service including the added benefits of dental and eyeglass coverage; improved safety and health provisions; increased membership participation in the union; and a number of revisions in the existing relationship between labor and postal management. The platform also included a section designed to insure the loyalty of the local representatives to the branch rather than the national office, and required that any salaries paid to Branch 36 officials by the national office be reverted to the local retirement fund. This was an important item to the carriers because the branch president's position during the strike and the negotiations had been compromised by his NALC National Executive Board salary that was greater than what he was paid as local president.

The platform was accepted by the members, and nominations for branch office were opened. There was a total of twenty positions to be filled on the Rank and File slate. Seventeen of these were part-time offices while three were full-time union positions. The Rank and File nominating committee, starting with the part-time positions, announced its choice for each office and then accepted nominations from the floor. Only two of the

part-time positions were contested with each candidate addressing the crowd who then voted for their choice. A tense moment arose when the strike captian, now the newly elected delegate from GPO, was announced as the Rank and File candidate for executive vice president. The delegate from Canal Street Station asked if the GPO delegate could also be nominated for the branch president's position. The affirmation quickly spread throughout the crowd until what appeared to be a clear majority was calling for the GPO delegate to seek the presidency. The GPO delegate addressed the crowd, thanked them for their support, explained that he was accepting the executive vice president's position on the slate because it was a job he preferred, and rather magnanimously nominated the Rank and File candidate for president. The audience responded with immediate, overwhelming approval. Two days later, the Rank and File slate was formally nominated at the regular Branch 36 membership meeting, which insured the carriers that the first open contest for branch officers in twenty-one years would occur.

The campaign for branch office

The enthusiasm generated at the Rank and File convention carried over into the campaign. Letter carriers, whose talents had been untapped by the union, volunteered

many various services. Some printed leaflets and had them reproduced by friendly patrons along their routes. Others painted campaign signs and posters. Rent-free office space was donated by a church in Manhattan and a travel agency in the Bronx. Before the December elections, a total of two thousand dollars was donated by rank and file carriers. The money was used to pay for telephones, campaign buttons, and an "Appreciation Rally" on the eve of the election. The Paterson, New Jersey branch of the NALC sent one hundred dollars and a letter of support for the Rank and File slate. For the first time in its history, the Puerto Rican Civil Service Workers Association endorsed candidates in a postal union election, pledging full support to the Rank and File slate. The group hoped both the Rank and File and the association would benefit from the experience and the alliance and noted that the incumbents had never given them any recognition at all.

Campaign articles, issues, and the candidates appeared in local newspapers and the Federal Times. Almost half million pieces of literature were distributed outside post offices to carriers arriving for work between 5:30 and 6:00 A.M. in Manhattan and 6:30 and 7:00 A.M. in the Bronx. Rank and File candidates also visited each of the post offices and spoke with the carriers either before or after their tour of duty or

during their lunch period. In their literature as well as in their speeches, the Rank and File carriers continuously cited the broken promises of the Branch 36 president and the national NALC president. While many carriers were ambivalent in their feelings toward the local leaders they were almost unanimous in their animosity toward the national president. The Rank and File stressed that "a vote against the local president is a vote against the national president." The local president was constantly portrayed as "weak" -- a "follower" who was a "stooge for the national." The Rank and File simultaneously emphasized the need for "strong, independent leadership."

National unions fail to
impress members with
their bargaining ability

During the campaign, a series of events occurred in the postal community which affected the election. In Washington, the seven exclusive postal unions had requested formal negotiations with the Post Office Department, but appeared quite unprepared to actually begin bargaining. While the craft unions were trying to iron out their differences concerning their approach to negotiations, the postal workers were becoming increasingly critical of their union leadership. The Postal Reorganization Act stated that actual negotiations could begin within thirty days after notice to negotiate

was served. The law stated that compression, i.e., the reduction of years to reach top pay, could only be retroactive to the day the issue was formally discussed, therefore, the postal workers interpreted the unions' delay as financially costly. Ultimately, the unions organized the Council of American Postal Employees (CAPE), to present a united front to postal management during negotiations. The council was also charged with developing a formula for the eventual merger of all postal employees into one union.

After meeting on the compression issue for almost a month, the Post Office Department and the unions announced, on November 20, that agreement had been reached. The Postal Reorganization Act had required that top pay be reached in not more than eight years. Therefore, in analyzing the settlement, postal workers realized the unions had not secured anything that was not already guaranteed by law. Further, they had not achieved retroactivity, and had accepted a formula for compression which did not place current employees with eight years service in top pay. While the formula did allow a new employee to reach top pay in eight years and reduced the time between increases for all workers, postal employees who already had eight years on the job would not receive top pay for another two or three years. Postal workers were dubious about the ability of their union

representatives to be successful in negotiations with the Post Office Department, and the benefits they did achieve through compression were obtained "in spite of the national union leaders, not because of them," it was often heard.

Industrial/independent
unions file suit

The National Postal Union and the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees had filed suit challenging the labor-management section of the Postal Reorganization Act which excluded them from involvement in the transitional negotiations. These two industrial and independent unions charged the craft unions with racial discrimination and with "making a deal" with postal management that not only excluded them from the initial bargaining, but in so doing, also threatened their existence as labor organizations. This, the independents claimed, was clearly not the intention of the postal legislation. Additionally, they questioned the entire concept of craft structure in the postal service, citing a number of employee classifications that were obviously outside craft delineation. Finally, the independents attacked the absurdity of excluding them from bargaining by pointing to the fact that one of NPU's locals, MBPU in New York City, consisted of a larger membership than five of the nationally recognized craft unions. The legal

action significantly indicated that the unions intended to fully participate in the reorganization.

"Five year plan" exposed
by Rank and File

The Rank and File candidates obtained a copy of the secret "five year plan" of the Post Office Department, officially titled, "Five Year Planning for the New Postal Service" designated for "limited official use" only. Basically, it was intended to serve as a blueprint for the postal service to become self supporting by 1975. If implemented, the plan would increase productivity while decreasing jobs for postal employees. The Rank and File candidates were raising these issues in their campaign, but the incumbents did not appear to be aware of them. As the Post Office Department began to move toward implementing some of these changes, the letter carriers increasingly turned to the Rank and File for direction. In his book, Labor Organizations, Mark van de Vall describes a type of informal leader and the influence such a person may effect on others. His analysis is appropriate to the Rank and File campaign:

The traits of an opinion leader are, according to Katz, that he carries some authority as a person, that he has many contacts, and that he is better informed than those around him. Socially, however he must be considered and trusted as a member of the in-group. "They are like everyone else," writes Berelson, "only slightly more so." Opinion leaders often owe their expert knowledge to the attention they pay to press, radio, and television and to their attendance at the

meetings of their party, union, association, etc. . . .

The role of the opinion leaders becomes more crucial as (a) problems become more complicated, (b) policies change more rapidly, (c) decision making becomes more centralized, and (d) mass media give contradictory information.¹

Cutbacks become
campaign issue

One of the most disturbing policy changes of the Post Office Department, to the Branch 36 members, and probably the one most directly impacting on the branch election, involved the special delivery carriers. Although the Post Office Department had begun to institute these particular changes in 1968, it was not until 1970 that New York City was affected. In Manhattan and the Bronx, special delivery mail was sent out thirteen times a day in business areas and eight times a day in residential communities. The Department reduced the number of special delivery trips to four each day. Further, the Department decreed that the first-class carriers would deliver some of the special mail on their regular routes. Most upsetting to the special delivery carriers was the fact that the number of special delivery positions was being greatly reduced and the system was being decentralized. This meant all special delivery mail would now

¹Mark van deVall, Labor Organizations: A Macro-and-Micro-Sociological Analysis on a Comparative Basis, p. 103.

be delivered from the post office of final destination. Therefore, all of the special delivery carriers that worked, for instance, in GPO or Grand Central post office, but delivered mail for zones other than Grand Central or GPO proper would, if they preferred to remain special delivery carriers, have to transfer to the post office in the zone of final destination. Not only were jobs eliminated, but carriers were transferred and tours for many were changed. The union protested the cutbacks and even filed suit in court to prevent the changes but to no avail. More than three hundred special delivery carriers in Branch 36 constituted a hard core group of opposition to the incumbents who often served as distributors of Rank and File literature and were generous contributors of funds for the campaign. Many had worked at Grand Central with the Rank and File candidate for president, and at GPO with the Rank and File candidate for executive vice president. The support of the special delivery carriers was invaluable to the Rank and File slate. In a number of Manhattan post offices, the Rank and File candidates were able to gain access to a majority of the letter carriers through the efforts of the special delivery carriers. Throughout the New York post office a developing network of cooperative effort was becoming increasingly evident. This expanding network of informal

communications proved more effective than the existing formal channels.

The "free-speech issue

By November, the campaign was in full swing. The Rank and File candidates were not allowed to enter post offices to speak with carriers, but such was not the case for the incumbents. At a meeting with postal management, the Rank and File candidates were told they would only be allowed to speak to carriers inside postal facilities if the incumbent branch officers would agree. The branch officers, however, claimed that it was postal management that would not allow any form of campaigning inside the post offices. Further, it was rumored that fifty-two postal inspectors were assigned to enforce postal restrictions on campaign activities. On November 4, two days after the branch president had campaigned inside Gracie post office, the top two Rank and File candidates entered the Lenox Hill post office to speak with the carriers. More than two hundred carriers gathered in the swing room to hear the candidates. It was a little later than 2:00 P.M., and the station superintendent advised the carriers that they would first have to end their tour of duty before listening to the candidates. Before the carriers could hit off the clock at 2:30 P.M., they were instructed that they were being

given one hour of mandatory overtime. The carriers un-
animously refused the order, hit off the clock and returned
to the swing room. After speaking with the carriers for
half an hour, the Rank and File candidates were advised
by the station superintendent that he had received a
call from upper management instructing him not to allow
the candidates to campaign inside the post office. The
Rank and File spokesmen finished their speeches and left
the facility without commotion.

The Post Office Department immediately brought
administrative charges against the two Rank and File
candidates and issued strict warnings that both would be
fired if they attempted to enter any other post offices
to speak with letter carriers. Two days later, the two
Rank and File candidates "crashed" Madison Square station
and began addressing the letter carriers on their lunch
break. Before the candidates could speak, three postal
managers attempted to eject them from the premises. Not
only did the Rank and File candidates ignore management's
threats and refuse to leave the building, they raised
the question of freedom of speech and management's inter-
ference with union activities. The candidates reminded
the carriers that they were in their swing room and on
their own time. The reaction of the more than one hun-
dred letter carriers frightened the managers. Loud
roars, first cheers, then stamping, banging chairs and

tables, and finally chants belittling management for their interference emanated from the angry group. Visibly shaken, the managers retreated to their office where they phoned higher-ups to report the incident and receive further instructions.

Charges brought against the Rank and File leaders by the Post Office Department were being compounded on an almost daily basis. While postal management was busily preparing various administrative charges, the Rank and File candidates were busy "crashing" other post offices in Manhattan and the Bronx. On Tuesday, November 10th, the two Rank and File leaders posted and signed notices in their respective stations, Grand Central and GPO, to the effect that an appeal was being made to all carriers on all tours by the Rank and File not to volunteer to work for straight time on Wednesday, November 11 (Armistice Day). Each candidate was charged with "conduct unbecoming a postal employee," and received notification of a proposal to remove him from the postal service within thirty-five days. The Rank and File xeroxed the charges and thousands of copies were distributed to carriers in Manhattan and the Bronx. On each of these notifications of removal, the Rank and File emphasized the fact that these were carriers who were not afraid to stand up to postal management, "the kind of leadership needed in these difficult times."

The issues raised by the candidates and their confrontations with postal management were reported in the Rank and File flyers and distributed to the letter carriers on an almost daily basis through an incredibly efficient distribution system. The "freedom of speech" issue was taking on increased importance to the letter carriers as the campaign progressed. On Monday, November 23, the Rank and File scheduled an appearance at Grand Central post office. Denied access to the facility, the Rank and File candidates announced that if the carriers wanted to hear them speak, they would have to come outside. Almost four hundred carriers left the postal premises to listen to the insurgents. A speaker's box was set up on the sidewalk surrounded by signs which read: "Are we free men in a free society without freedom of speech?" "Does the postal manual supercede the Bill of Rights?" The speakers exhorted the crowd to a high emotional pitch by asking questions that dictated merely a yes or no response. "Are we men?" followed by "Are we free?" and finally, "Are we afraid of postal management?" The rousing rally ended, but the carriers refused to reenter the post office unless the Rank and File candidates were also allowed in the building. It was only at the urging of the Rank and File leaders that the Grand Central carriers returned to work. The following day, the top two Rank and File candidates were summoned to the

postmaster's office. Instead of issuing additional charges or threats, postal management discussed the campaign in very civil terms. The postmaster's representative explained the need to avoid disruption and bad publicity which could damage the Department's image. While not specifically granting permission to the Rank and File candidates to campaign in postal facilities, management acknowledged the legitimacy of the campaign and stressed that it would be forced to react if the campaign threatened to interfere with the Department's operation. For the first time, postal management seemed to be considering the previously inconceivable notion that the Rank and File candidates might actually be elected.

Incumbents refuse
to debate

The branch president continuously turned down the Rank and File challenge to "meet anywhere, anytime, to debate the issues in front of letter carriers." The Rank and File challenge to the incumbents received wide publicity, and a day-by-day account of the incumbent's refusal was distributed in much of the Rank and File literature. The October 28 issue of The Federal Times referred to the offer to debate in one of its featured articles. Ultimately, WNET television invited three candidates from each slate to appear on a live interview show Thanksgiving Eve, November 25. The show was widely

publicized and a large audience was anticipated. The Rank and File was represented by its candidates for president, executive vice president and editor. No one appeared on behalf of the incumbents despite a personal invitation from the show's producer. The absence of the Branch 36 union officials was dramatically highlighted through camera close-ups of an empty chair on the set. The moderator of the program, while pointing to the vacant seat, explained that it was for the Branch 36 president, who had been invited but did not show up. The failure of the incumbents to appear on the program afforded the Rank and File the entire allotted time to present their views without dispute. The show proved invaluable to the Rank and File. Financial contributions and campaign volunteers reached a peak shortly after the television interview.

Rank & File sweep shocks
postal community

On December 2, 1970, voting machines were set up from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. at Manhattan Center and the Savoy Manor near the Bronx GPO. Almost four thousand members of Branch 36 cast ballots in this, the first openly contested election in over twenty years. When the totals were announced a little after 10:00 P.M., the entire slate of twenty Rank and File candidates was swept into office. The Honest Ballot Association's tally

showed that the Rank and File candidate for branch president had received 2,341 votes to the incumbent's 1,643.

The election of the Rank and File in New York City created shock waves throughout much of the postal community. Local management had established an adversarial relationship with the new union leaders. The national unions, especially NALC, were concerned with the Rank and File sentiment for autonomous local unions and an increasing challenge to incumbent officials in a number of large cities.

More insurgents elected

In Minneapolis, a majority of Rank and File candidates was elected to branch office. In Philadelphia, the third largest NALC branch in the nation, the entire incumbent administration was voted out of office. The Philadelphia insurgents had established communications with the New York Rank and File and favored the principles contained in their platform. In Boston, a group of letter carriers challenged the incumbent administration, met with the New York Rank and File to discuss union principles and campaign strategy, and then utilized much of the literature and flyers from the New York election, in some cases merely transposing their names over those of the Branch 36 candidates. The Boston election results were announced shortly before the first anniversary of the postal strike and as in Branch 36, the entire slate

of old guard officials was voted out of office.

National unions merge

The impetus for change seemed to be sweeping through the entire postal service. Within days of the Rank and File success in New York, and following months of negotiations, three postal unions reached a merger agreement. The tentative agreement, subject to membership ratification, was signed by the United Federation of Postal Clerks, the National Federation of Post Office and Motor Vehicle Employees, and the National Association of Post Office and General Service Maintenance Employees. Before the year ended, the National Association of Special Delivery Messengers also joined the amalgamation. The agreement to merge the Special Delivery Messengers and the Motor Vehicle Operators ended speculation that the postal unions would ultimately evolve into two types of representation, one encompassing "inside" workers, i.e., clerks, mailhandlers and maintenance classifications, and the other covering "outside" employees such as carriers, messengers and motor vehicle operators. In March 1971, the National Postal Union agreed to become a member of the conglomerate. Before signing the merger agreement, NPU insisted that the new union's constitution contain the following provisions: mail ballot election of all national officers; proportionate representation at conventions; and a high degree of local autonomy, including the

right to petition for recognition as an area bargaining unit. In exchange for these concessions, NPU agreed to withdraw all litigation challenging its exclusion from the national contract negotiations. The merger proposition was presented to the memberships of the five postal unions in a mail referendum. More than 95 percent of the almost 160,000 ballots cast were in favor of the merger. The joining of these five unions established an industrial union with a combined membership of 300,000 workers in the postal service. While four of the unions were already AFL-CIO affiliates, the incorporation of the previously independent NPU, added 80,000 members to the labor federation. The amalgamation, charted as the American Postal Workers Union, (APWU) and recognized as the largest postal union in the world, officially came into existence on July 1, 1971. The new union, although industrial in nature, maintained internal craft distinctions. Each of the former craft union presidents was a member of the APWU executive board serving as president of his respective craft. Designated as General President was Francis S. Filbey, formally president of the 170,000 member United Federation of Postal Clerks. David Silvergleid, president of the 80,000 member National Postal Union became the first General Executive Vice President.

Resistance to merger

Four postal unions remained outside the merger. The largest of these, the 212,000 member NALC, while publicly stating support for "one postal union," preferred to remain separate. NALC president, Rademacher, initially held that the letter carriers would merge only after the other unions completed their consolidation. However, once the merger was formalized Rademacher backed away from his earlier position. He continued to raise the "inside" and "outside" concept and even threatened to disaffiliate entirely from the AFL-CIO, mentioning the Teamsters union as an alternative. As an increasing number of NALC members raised the merger issue, Rademacher suggested that a union encompassing all communications workers be considered. At the 1972 NALC convention, a committee was charged with the responsibility of discussing merger with the Communications Workers of America and reporting on those talks at the next biennial convention. For as long as he would remain president, Rademacher avoided any serious consideration of merger for the NALC.

Another postal union which chose not to merge was the forty-four thousand member National Post Office Mail Handlers, Watchmen, Messengers and Group Leaders Division of the Laborer's International Union of North America (LIUNA). The Mail Handlers had affiliated with LIUNA in

1968; was in both instances a member of the AFL-CIO; and, therefore, bound by the federation's no-raiding policy, as was the UFPC. The independent NPU, however, was under no such restriction. For a number of years, particularly during the Mail Handlers transitional period of affiliation with LIUNA, NPU waged a number of bitter jurisdictional disputes over mailhandler recognition.

One of the most successful NPU organizing campaigns took place in N.Y.C., where more than five hundred mailhandlers, including the local presidents in Manhattan and the Bronx, joined MBPU. In the Philadelphia post office, it was the Mail Handlers who were successful in obtaining recognition previously held by the NPU. After a long and difficult struggle to obtain a foothold among federal workers, LIUNA was not likely to risk losing its recognition through merger.

The National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees, an independent industrial union with mostly black members, was under a convention mandate not to participate in merger related discussions. The Alliance, fearful of losing its identity and diminishing its thrust which was primarily concerned with civil rights issues, did not want to be "swallowed up" by the mammoth APWU. Further, the Alliance was continuing its suit challenging the legality of its being excluded from the national contract negotiations.

National Rural Letter Carriers Association, with thirty thousand members was also subject to a convention mandate not to merge. While the National Association of Letter Carriers movement toward merger could be described as cautious, the history of the Rural Carriers Association concerning affiliation of any sort could best be described as conservative. The rural carrier envisioned himself as a private entrepreneur and relied on his political connections when seeking to achieve goals or adjust grievances. Having obtained his position through politics, most often sponsorship by a local Congressman, the rural carrier has traditionally been loyal to the parochial principles of the politician or political party which dominates in his hometown. Quite often the prevailing mores in areas of the country serviced by rural carriers are not pro-union. Despite their reputations for separation, there was speculation in the postal community that merger would take place between the two carrier associations before either one would amalgamate with the APWU. It was in this atmosphere of tremendous realignment and reorganization for the Post Office Department and the postal unions that the first contract under the Postal Reorganization Act was negotiated.

Summary

The conflict that engulfed the postal community reached a peak with the 1970 strike. The resolution of that historic uprising, however, did not mark an end to the turmoil. The promised settlement, utilized by the postal workers' representatives as an inducement to end the strike, had been contrived and was, therefore, never realized. The broken promises of the union leaders were coupled with their half-hearted and hollow threats of strike. Corresponding to the unions' lack of resolve was a hardening of positions on the part of the Nixon Administration and, particularly, postal management. Once the crisis created by the strike ended and it became obvious that the national unions would not call a nationwide strike, Congress busied itself with other priorities, and the postal bill which included an 8 percent pay raise, languished. The question of whether or not the postal workers would be disciplined for their illegal walkout remained unresolved, due to the Administration's decision to take a hard line with the striking air traffic controllers, and also because it was used as a leverage in the negotiations with the postal unions. The inability of the national unions to achieve any significant gains at these negotiations further alienated the rank and file.

By the time the postal bill was approved in August of 1970, a number of insurgent groups had formed in

opposition to incumbent local union leaders. By the beginning of 1971, a number of these insurgents had assumed control of strategic union offices. In New York City the Rank and File had swept the entire incumbent Branch 36 slate out of office. Many of these newly elected union officials had been informal leaders prior to and during the strike. On their way to being elected as formal representatives they had challenged a number of long standing and previously inviolate rules and bureaucratic regulations of the old Post Office Department.

While the structure of labor relations was changing in the postal environment so were many of the characters who would ultimately confront each other in this new atmosphere. The strike and ultimate postal legislation had brought a total of 14 percent in salary gains for postal workers. Many issues, however, still remained unresolved. The final version of the bill, officially titled the Postal Reorganization Act, Public Law 91-375, provided for collective bargaining, but did not allow the union-shop, area wage differentials, nor the right to strike. The bill did not include recognition for the independent and industrial postal unions, creating a volatile issue which directly led to the merger of five postal unions, including the large industrial union, NPU, into the American Postal Workers Union (APWU).

These historic realignments and reorganized structures of the postal service and its unions were related to the attempt to institutionalize conflict in the postal environment. Primary among the means for this institutionalization were the processes contained in the Postal Reorganization Act which called for collective bargaining and binding arbitration as a method of dispute resolution. With the first contract negotiations underway in this new and dynamic atmosphere of industrial and labor relations, a number of important questions arose. Would the system work? Would collective bargaining, especially if successful for postal workers, spread to other sections of the federal workforce? What impact would the newly elected and militant insurgent groups have on their unions and the restructured labor/management relationship in the postal service? Would the trend toward merger continue among the postal unions leading ultimately to the realization of the "one big union" concept? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING UNDER THE POSTAL

REORGANIZATION ACT: 1971-1981

A DECADE OF CONTRACTS

AND CONFLICTS

The bargaining process

The collective bargaining provision of the 1970 Postal Reorganization Act provided for ninety days of negotiation between the parties, followed (if no agreement has been reached) by forty-five days of fact-finding before a three member panel appointed from a list of "neutrals" submitted by the Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS). The fact-finders' report would lead to a second round of negotiations which could last for no more than forty-five days. If agreement was not reached within 180 days of the commencement of collective bargaining, and no other procedure for binding resolution was chosen, a three-member arbitration board would be selected to issue a binding award within forty-five days of its appointment. No one who served on the fact-finding panel could be named to the arbitration board. The Postmaster General would select one member, the unions would select one member and these two parties

would select the third person. If they could not agree on the final member within five days, the selection would be made by the Director of FMCS. If the framing of any issue submitted to the arbitration board was disputed by the parties, the fact-finding panel would be responsible for its construction and submission. The entire process could, if utilized to its maximum capacity, take as long as 225 days to complete.

The first negotiations begin

Negotiations between the Post Office Department and the unions began on January 20, 1971. The unions were allied in a coordinated bargaining committee, the Council of American Postal Employees (CAPE). After ninety days of negotiations, no agreement had been reached. The unions were interested in wages and fringe benefits while postal management focused on work rules and management's rights issues. The postal service was seeking to grant line supervisors authority to suspend or discharge employees prior to a hearing. This would drastically alter the existing procedures which allowed an employee to remain in a work or pay status for most of the time his appeal of disciplinary action was pending, while also assuring him of a hearing prior to serving any penalty. As the collective bargaining process dragged on it appeared as if the procedures outlined in the Postal Reorganization

Act would run their full course. Opposition to the binding arbitration provision, however, increased among local leaders of the postal unions. The newly elected leadership of Branch 36, in New York City, was in the forefront of this dissent.

Negotiations stall

As the first round of bargaining and the fact-finding phase of the process concluded with the parties no closer to agreement than when negotiations began, Branch 36 and the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union scheduled a June 10 press conference in New York City. Joined by local union presidents from the Metropolitan area and Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit, the New York leaders denounced the fact-finders' report issued the previous day and announced the creation of a nationwide "strike task force." Further, Branch 36 and MBPU declared that they would hold a joint strike rally in Manhattan Center on June 30, and conduct a strike vote the following day if satisfactory agreement had not been reached by the national negotiators. While wages and fringe benefits were important issues for the dissenting locals, so were areas concerning job security, summary discipline, technological changes and work rules. "We will never allow job security items to go to arbitration," was the primary rallying cry and it was gathering support across the country. Even in Puerto Rico where post

office employment was highly valued, motions calling for "job security or strike" were passed at a number of union meetings.

Nixon Administration fears
"wildcat" strike
encourages settlement

In Washington, President Nixon voiced concern over the lack of progress in the negotiations as he prepared to assign his Assistant Secretary of Labor, William J. Usery to mediate the dispute. An article appearing in the Federal Employees' News Digest explained the reasons for the President's concern:

The administration is apprehensive about two possibilities that might occur if the issues are not resolved at the bargaining table.

One is that binding arbitration would result in unsatisfactory pay raises and fringe benefit liberalizations as far as the unions are concerned and this would result in another nationwide wildcat strike. The two big New York City postal unions that triggered last year's strike already have announced they are ready to walk out again....

And since the Nixon administration fought hard and successfully for the legislation that created the new postal system, it would risk the public's wrath if either a nationwide strike occurred or postal rates shot up.¹

Branch 36 under
trusteeship

Hard pressed to reach a settlement, the postal unions and postal management began bargaining in earnest. Rumors of wage offers and counterproposals arose from the negotia-

¹Federal Employees' News Digest, ed. Joseph Young, 44(June 14, 1971): p. 1.

tions. Postal management had finally placed a number of items on the bargaining table. The unions began compromising their position on the discipline and grievance procedures. None of this movement, however, was enough to hold the tide of rising militancy among postal workers. Support for the June 30 rally was increasing daily. Branch 36 solicited and received a mandate of support for any strike action from the Central Labor Council of the AFL-CIO in New York.

The national union leaders were fearful of losing control over their memberships. On June 22, NALC President Rademacher issued a bulletin declaring his intent "to test the new procedure to the full extent of the law." Rademacher listed a series of disciplinary examples and possible penalties, including fines, firings and imprisonment, that any postal employee inclined toward going on strike should consider."¹

On June 25, Rademacher issued a proclamation placing Branch 36 under trusteeship. A national officer, Bernard R. Murphy was appointed trustee. The following letter was sent to every member of Branch 36:

¹NALC Bulletin, June 22, 1971.

"Branch 36 NALC
"255 W. 43 Street
"New York, New York
"Bernard R. Murphy
"National Trustee

"June 28, 1971

"Dear Brothers:

"The National Association of Letter Carriers has imposed trusteeship upon Branch 36 pursuant to the National Constitution.

"I have been appointed Trustee, and I have assumed control of the Branch. I have removed all officers and cancelled all meetings.

"Please be assured that my sole interest will be to further and protect the interests of the membership.

"You are hereby notified that the Pre-Strike Rally and Strike Vote scheduled for June 30 and July 1 are cancelled by Branch 36. Participation in the rally and vote is not authorized.

"A hearing has been scheduled regarding the trusteeship for July 9, 1971, at 10:00 A.M. at NALC Headquarters, 100 Indiana Avenue NW, Washington, D.C.

Fraternally,

Bernard R. Murphy"¹

The national president grossly underestimated the resolve of the branch leadership. The local officers refused to surrender their positions or turn the union office over to the trustee. The attorney issuing the papers on behalf of the national union was politely but firmly escorted from the premises. The NALC immediately petitioned the federal court for a preliminary injunction to enforce the trusteeship. On June 30, 1971, Federal District Judge

¹Bernard R. Murphy to Branch 36, N.Y.C., June 28, 1971.

John Cannella denied the petition. the NALC appealed this decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals.

Massive pre-strike
rally in New York City

While Judge Cannella was denying the injunction to the national union, the pre-strike rally was underway at Manhattan Center. More than twelve thousand workers were assembled for the largest postal rally in history. Both balconies and the main ballroom of the massive meeting hall were filled far beyond legal capacity. The crowd swelled to the outer lobbies and spilled onto both sides of Thirty-fourth Street. Harry Van Ardsdale, President of the Central Labor Council of the AFL-CIO, who was one of the featured speakers and a dominant figure in labor for more than a quarter of a century, described the rally as "the greatest single demonstration for a particular labor cause," that he had ever witnessed. Van Ardsdale pledged the full support of the labor council and called on all other labor groups to do the same. Joining Van Ardsdale at the podium was Victor Gotbaum, Executive Director of District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, a union representing 100,000 workers. Voicing support for the postal workers, Gotbaum declared that "the struggle of the postal workers is a struggle for all workers, especially those in the public sector." Also pledging their allegiance to

a united effort were more than one hundred postal union leaders from every region in the U.S.A. and Puerto Rico. In addition to those locals represented at the rally, were promises of commitment in the form of letters and telegrams from hundreds of locals unable to attend. The messages emanating from Manhattan Center were loud and clear: "No binding arbitration on vital issues! Job security or strike! No contract on July 20--no work!"

While the New York rally was in progress, Rademacher and other national officers were leading a demonstration of their own in Washington, D.C. in which Rademacher reported widespread support for the national negotiations and cited the presence of letter carriers from Washington, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut at the D.C. rally. In fact, the crowd at the Washington demonstration totaled less than 150 people, causing postal management to look beyond the national leaders when offering a contract likely to be accepted by the membership. A tentative settlement, which the national negotiators had agreed upon and which was scheduled to be announced in conjunction with the official inauguration of the United States Postal Service (USPS) on July 1, was hastily withdrawn.

Strike ballots seized

As the Post Office band played on the steps of Manhattan's General Post Office for a bevy of political and postal officials gathered to celebrate the birth of the United States Postal Service, thousands of postal workers were only a few hundred yards away at Manhattan Center voting to authorize a strike against the new agency. Simultaneously, the NALC leadership was successfully petitioning the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for an order to immediately impound the strike authorization ballots of Branch 36. Thus, late in the evening of July 1, as employees of the Honest Ballot Association were in the midst of tabulating the letter carriers' votes, the ballots were seized. At the time of impoundment, the vote was approximately twenty to one in favor of the strike authorization. Ballots cast by members of the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union were not affected by the court order. These votes tallied 10,645 in favor of the strike authorization and 608 opposed.

The pot is sweetened

In Washington, the negotiators began to react to the organized militancy of the postal workers. A \$300 bonus and two wage increases of \$250 each were added to what had previously been management's final offer, which the national unions were prepared to accept. Also added to the contract was a cost-of-living increase, limited to a maximum

of \$166 for the life of the two-year agreement. The total wage package amounted to \$1,716. Postal workers would immediately receive the \$300 bonus and a \$250 salary increase. Four additional \$250 increases would be paid over the life of the contract. The cost-of-living provision would be applied during the second year of the agreement. By 1973, the salaries of postal clerks and letter carriers would range from \$8,488 to \$11,073. Prior to the strike, top pay after 21 years was only \$8,442. The contract also contained a job security clause which guaranteed that there would be no layoffs of employees for any reason during the life of the contract. Rather than resorting to binding arbitration, the agreement provided that many of the unresolved issues would be negotiated at the local level.

The contract contained enough to diminish the discontent of most postal workers. Although the New York locals of NALC and the MBPU remained critical of the agreement, the leadership advised against any job action. At a joint meeting of MBPU and Branch 36 in Manhattan Center on July 26, the local presidents, who had been authorized by their respective membership to take whatever action deemed necessary, announced there would be no strike to the four thousand people assembled. The majority of postal workers at the meeting seemed to accept the decision not to strike, but many were angry. A number of postal

workers rushed toward the stage and a few scuffles broke out. A hostile crowd accused the two union leaders of selling out and followed them from the meeting hall. Before the taxi they entered could pull away, it was almost overturned by a group of disgruntled and disappointed rank and file members. The local presidents based their decision not to strike on "an erosion of support from other locals." Although it was true that a certain amount of support for a strike had diminished, many activists in the New York locals expressed the opinion that a strike should have been called.

Continued local resistance

With the first negotiated agreement between the USPS and the postal unions in place, dissatisfaction with the leadership and policies of the national union continued to develop among NALC branches. Primarily, these locals were concerned with inevitable changes in the carrier craft function ignored by the national agreement. A clause in the agreement which allowed for the "crossing of crafts," i.e., the interchange of personnel and duties between letter carriers and clerks was a disturbing issue to many letter carriers. In fact, the previous NALC convention had unanimously passed a resolution mandating the national president to preserve strict craft lines. Local leaders were disappointed that no improvements were

were realized in the area of fringe benefits, especially retirement and medical plans. They were wary of the new discipline procedures which increased the authority of the line supervisor allowing an accused employee to suffer the penalty prior to a hearing.

Another issue which had raised the ire of local leaders was the fact that the national president had ignored a resolution passed at the 1970 NALC convention which stipulated that any negotiated agreement must be ratified by the membership before being accepted by the president. Concerned that the national leadership was not properly representing nor responding to the needs and mandates of the membership, a group of critical local leaders scheduled a "conference of concerned carriers" in Minneapolis, Minnesota, On October 13, 1971.

National rank and file movement formed

The meeting was designed to determine the amount of support a program for change within the NALC engendered, and how such a plan might be constructed. Branch leaders and letter carrier representatives from fourteen states and many large cities attended. Many others, unable to attend the hastily organized gathering, sent messages of support. The Branch 36 representatives reporting on the status of the trusteeship action, announced that the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, by a two-to-one decision

on September 28, had reversed Justice Cannella's June 30 decision denying the national union's petition, leaving the national president to determine what action would be taken. The Branch 36 president stated that the local was considering an appeal to the Supreme Court but might be prohibited because the national union had been withholding dues payments to the branch and the local treasury was nearly depleted. The group was particularly incensed because no hearing on the matter had been conducted by the national, despite a provision in the union's constitution requiring one. After much discussion, the carriers in attendance unanimously voted to totally support the New York local in its struggle with the national union.

The Minneapolis meeting resulted in the following resolutions being adopted:

1. There must be a general referendum election of all national officers based on the principle of one man-one vote. This would mean the abolishment of the present proxy vote system whereby single representatives at conventions cast ballots for groups of members
2. A national referendum must be initiated in accordance with Article XX, Sec. 5 of the national constitution to bring about the one man-one vote concept prior to the next convention in July 1972

3. There must be regional elections for regional representatives
4. All nationally negotiated agreements must be submitted to the membership for ratification
5. There must be a change in the present national leadership

The group named itself "The National Rank and File Movement," and the president of the Minneapolis branch was elected national coordinator. Regional coordinators were selected to organize and communicate with letter carriers in their respective area.

Campaign for one man-
one vote

The National Rank and File Movement (NRFM) immediately set out to obtain the required endorsements for the one man-one vote resolution. Before the question could be sent to the entire membership by referendum the proposed amendment would have to be endorsed by 3 percent of all NALC branches comprising 5 percent of the total membership. This meant about 200 of the 6,000 locals representing approximately 12,000 letter carriers would have to endorse the proposal. The national constitution further required that endorsements come from a minimum of 10 states and the proposal be approved by no less than a two-thirds vote of members at a branch meeting. Certification by branches approving the proposition would have

to be submitted to the national office six months prior to the national convention, specifically, no later than January 8, 1972. Within a week of the Minneapolis meeting, the propositions were approved by the required 5 percent of the membership and shortly thereafter endorsements came from the necessary ten states. In less than a month all that was needed to have the propositions go to referendum was approval from approximately one hundred branches. The New York area alone contained many times the number of branches still required to approve the proposals. On Long Island there were more than seventy NALC branches. By mid-November the proposed amendments appeared certain to be approved by the required number of letter carrier locals.

Opposition from the national

The NALC leadership had been consistently opposed to the one man-one vote principle for electing national officers. It was also apparent that if the propositions were presented to the membership in a referendum, they would be adopted. In an attempt to assert their leadership on this important issue, the NALC issued a national information bulletin on November 3, 1971, declaring that the union's executive council was endorsing direct-vote election procedures. The national leadership's proposal for one man-one vote in the election of national officers

would be voted on at the 1972 convention, and if accepted, would take effect for the 1974 elections. The executive council hoped their promise to propose and support a direct vote amendment would satisfy, and perhaps even stifle the National Rank and File Movement's efforts to achieve a direct voting formula prior to the 1972 national elections. The action taken by the executive council increased the resolve of the National Rank and File Movement. More determined than ever, the NRFM incorporated the position of the national council into its own literature, highlighting it as a further endorsement of its position. As the National Rank and File Movement approached the required number of endorsements for their propositions, the national president continued to react. First, he authorized a merger of seventy-five NALC branches on Long Island, a startling reversal of position for the national president who had previously been adamant in his opposition to the merger. Next, the national president threatened to place additional branches, including the Arizona State Association, in trusteeship. Finally, unable to diminish the fervor of the Rank and File Movement, Rademacher struck at its heart.

Trusteeship imposed
on Branch 36

On December 3, 1971, exactly one year and a day after the largest election turnout in the history of the NALC,¹ Bernard R. Murphy, the national officer and appointed trustee, accompanied by Ralph Merigliano, president of the New York State Association; Gus Johnson, the recently defeated ex-president of Branch 36, who was now an appointed regional NALC representative; Bruce Simon, an attorney for the national union; and a small contingent of N.Y.C. policemen appeared at the Branch 36 office to issue a writ of trusteeship. Before issuing the writ, the NALC lawyer offered a proposal from the national union which would eliminate the imposition of the trusteeship. The proposal, which would have made appointees of the democratically elected officers, was emphatically rejected by the Branch 36 leaders.

The trusteeship was, in fact, a struggle for the membership of Branch 36. On Monday, December 6, the three full-time officers of the branch returned to duty as letter carriers at the post office stations where they had worked prior to being elected to union office. For two

¹More letter carriers cast ballots in the 1970 Branch 36 election than had ever voted to elect any officer in NALC history, including votes at the national conventions.

weeks "the struggle to save the union" raged. The appointed trustees made every attempt to get the membership to support them and cooperate during the trusteeship. They appealed to members on a personal basis "for the good of the union." All efforts to bring the membership to accept the role of the trustees failed. In fact, during the entire period, not one member of Branch 36, with the exception of the ex-president and one retiree who was involved for only one day, accepted or assisted the trustees in any way. On December 9, the ousted officers led a demonstration of more than two thousand letter carriers outside the union's headquarters in mid-Manhattan. Before the demonstration began, the trustees, joined by Richard O'Connell, president of the New Jersey State Association, had abandoned the Branch 36 offices and set up headquarters at the ex-president's regional union office on West Forty-second Street, where they remained for the duration of the trusteeship.

The demonstration received a fair amount of press and TV coverage. The issue that apparently had the most impact was the national union's replacement of the first democratically elected officers in more than twenty years with, among others, the very individual whom the letter carriers had overwhelmingly voted out of office. This, along with the tremendous support of the membership, and the fact that no hearing on the issue was conducted,

placed the national leadership in a somewhat embarrassing position. Before the week was over, the national president asked to meet with the ousted president and executive vice president. The meeting took place in a Philadelphia train station on Tuesday morning, December 14. Rademacher was accompanied by a regional director of the NALC, who was also the appointed investigator in the trusteeship action. After much negotiation, agreement was reached concerning the terms for settling the trusteeship. Although the national president wrote the final points of the settlement and the Branch 36 officers returned to New York with a copy of the agreement, the national president failed to follow through with his responsibility concerning the termination of the trusteeship. Explaining that the agreement reached in Philadelphia was unacceptable to the union's legal counsel, the NALC president claimed that he could not keep his end of the bargain because, "he (counsel) is calling the shots." When word of the national president's turnabout reached the Branch 36 office, the local union leaders were outraged. First, because the national president had broken his word, and secondly, because a non-elected "outsider" was making major decisions for the union, contrary to the stated and documented intentions of the national president.

On Thursday, December 16, the Writ of Certiorari was reviewed by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

The parties were advised that Friday, December 17, would be the deadline for the attorneys representing Branch 36 to file a petition requesting the Court to hear an appeal on the matter of the trusteeship. Another session of negotiations between the national president and the ousted officials of Branch 36, with the appointed trustee acting as the intermediary, culminated at 3:05 P.M. the afternoon of December 17, just five minutes after the Branch 36 attorney had been instructed to file the appeal to the Supreme Court. The terms and conditions of the settlement were dictated by Branch 36 and agreed to by the national president. Thus the trusteeship was officially dissolved fourteen days after its inception. The appeal to the Supreme Court was withdrawn and the deposed local officers reinstated to official leadership status. While the Branch 36 leaders had survived the national union's assault, the struggle for one man-one vote had suffered a telling blow. The conflict over the trusteeship, the merger of the seventy-five Long Island branches, and the advent of the Christmas mail avalanche, combined to prevent the NRFM from obtaining the number of endorsements required to submit the question of direct voting for national officers to the total membership prior to the 1972 national convention. The issues of union democracy raised in the propositions put forth by the NRFM would resurface at that convention in an atmosphere of rancor and contro-

versy unprecedented in the annals of the NALC.

Conflict over local issues

Shortly after returning to office, the leadership of Branch 36 faced another crisis. In Washington, the national unions and postal management had established guidelines which would allow local negotiations to commence on February 1, 1972. The initial stage of the negotiations was scheduled to last for thirty days. This would be followed by forty-five days of additional bargaining at another level where regional postal and union representatives would attempt to resolve items impassed at the local level. If agreement could not be reached at this second step, the impassed items would be forwarded to the national level, where if unresolvable, the unions could present their arguments to arbitration for final determination. While the negotiable items did not include wages nor fringe benefits they did address important issues of seniority, work schedules, and health and safety areas. No meaningful agreement had been reached at the local level, and in many areas of the country, postal management would not even meet with the local union officials. Where management and the unions did meet, the response to items presented by the unions was virtually identical, i.e., "The item presented is non-negotiable." Local postal officials were obviously acting on orders from

higher levels of authority. The anticipated autonomy for local managers from the postal corporation was not forthcoming, in fact, it appeared as if local postal officials had less authority and decision-making power than before the reorganization of the old Post Office Department.

"Sit-in" at postal
management offices

In New York City the failure to negotiate had produced a volatile situation. Branch 36 printed and distributed a series of scathing attacks on all levels of postal management. This led to negotiations being broken off by the postal officials and the subsequent filing of an unfair labor practice by the letter carriers. The conflict reached a peak on March 1, when more than one thousand postal workers marched in front of Manhattan's General Post Office protesting the stalemated bargaining. As the demonstration was winding down, two hundred postal workers, including the presidents and other officers of Branch 36 and the Manhattan Bronx Postal Union, stormed the offices of the Regional Postmaster General on an upper floor of the massive postal facility. For seven hours, from 5:00 P.M. Wednesday, March 1, to 12:01 A.M. Thursday, March 2, approximately 150 demonstrators occupied the regional official's offices. The protest remained peaceful throughout, in spite of the fact that postal

inspectors and various management spokesmen continually threatened those sitting-in with arrest and imprisonment for criminal trespass. The deadlines set by the inspectors for evacuating the premises came and went but the demonstrators did not leave until postal management agreed to renew local negotiations in good faith. Within one week of the sit-in, following a series of unpublicized and unofficial meetings between postal managers and union officials, agreement was reached on a local contract.

Not all items were agreed upon however, and thus were passed on to the regional level for further consideration. In many areas of the country, entire proposed local contracts were impasses. The national NALC president estimated the number of impasses for his union at 80,000 to 100,000, while the head of the American Postal Workers Union stated, "we must have had 60,000 impasses or more—we couldn't even count them."¹ If the national unions didn't have time to count them they certainly didn't have time to address them, nevermind resolve them. Faced with an impending national convention that promised to be volatile, and less than a year away from the start of negotiations for a new national contract,

¹Martin J. Levine, "The U.S. Postal Service: A Labor Relations Hybrid," Employee Relations Law Journal,⁴ (Autumn 1978): p. 235.

the union chiefs decided to withdraw almost all of the im-
passed articles. This action by the national leadership
increased the ire of those members already critical of
the National Agreement and the policies and leadership
of the national union. The National Rank and File Move-
ment was more convinced than ever that the national leader-
ship had to be changed before the next round of contract
negotiations commenced early in 1973.

Factional politics at the
1972 NALC convention

The NALC convention convened in New Orleans,
Louisiana on July 10, 1972. More than four thousand
letter carriers, the largest number of delegates in the
union's history, were in attendance. There were two
major factions present. The National Rank and File Move-
ment sought democratization of the union, and supported
three amendments to the constitution. The other group
represented the interests of the national officers, and
stood in opposition to the changes. The first amendment
was designed to replace the proxy system of voting for
national officers with a direct referendum involving all
members. The second required election of regional rep-
resentatives by referendum balloting restricted to mem-
bers within the particular region the official repres-
ented, as opposed to the existing system of proxy voting

at national convention.¹ The third amendment commissioned all nationally negotiated contract agreements be submitted to the total membership for final approval.

For five full days the convention hall rocked at a high emotional pitch. Discussion, debate, and parliamentary and political maneuvering accompanied the barrage of charges, countercharges, challenges to the chair, and teller votes on vital issues. Raucous cheers and catcalls pervaded every meeting. The delegates obviously divided on major issues, particularly the proposals to amend the constitution, found themselves constantly courted by representatives from every side of the issues being disputed. This convention, unlike the majority of recent NALC conclaves did not allow the delegates much time for sight-seeing or the usual tourist attractions. The meetings ran for at least eight hours each day and the furor did not abate with the close of official business. Evenings and early morning hours were filled with caucuses, strategy meetings preparation and distribution of position

¹The proxy system of voting granted 1 vote for every block of up to 20 members. This allowed disproportionate representation to the small branches which predominated in the rural areas. It also concentrated power in the hands of the incumbents who gathered the proxy votes and cast them at the convention. The structure of the system allowed 5 branches with 1 or 2 members each to have 5 votes, while a branch with 60 members would only have 3 proxies. Branch 36, the largest in the NALC, with more than 9,000 members had only 460 votes under the proxy system.

papers and data sheets all geared toward gathering the support of as many delegates as possible. While the incumbent officers utilized traditional methods of campaigning, the National Rank and File Movement introduced an entirely new dimension to the union's politics. Not only did the NRFM distribute thousands of pieces of literature along with a variety of paraphernalia including pens, pencils, signs, placards, buttons and balloons, they also video-taped the entire proceedings and held special viewings for interested delegates. The video-tape was also used during interviews of delegates at the convention hall, on the street and in the lobbies of hotels housing the carrier representatives. The playback of these interviews always attracted a large number of carriers. The NRFM leaders also appeared on local television during the week of convention. Despite the tremendous effort put forth by the NRFM all three of their proposed amendments were defeated. The vote for referendum voting for national officers was not even permitted to reach the floor so long as it was intended to go into effect immediately, i.e., the 1972 national elections. The principle of one man-one vote, however, was approved as put forth by the national union's executive council with the proviso that it not take effect before the 1974 elections. The regional elections proposition was defeated by a margin of only eighty votes. The amendment calling for membership

ratification of all nationally negotiated agreements also lost in a close vote. The convention did, however, approve a limited form of ratification through an appointed committee. With the proxy system of voting still in effect, the entire slate of national officers was reelected, but not without opposition. In fact, more candidates were nominated for national office than at any previous NALC convention. Although the goals of the National Rank and File Movement were not attained, the forces of change had been set in motion. More allies had rallied to the cause, the democratization of the union had advanced, the political dynamics of the NALC would never again be the same, and the National Rank and File Movement had established itself as a potent force within the union.

The 1973 negotiations

With the convention a matter of history, the National Rank and File Movement directed its energies toward the upcoming contract negotiations. Bargaining between the parties was scheduled to begin in mid-March, 1973. In January, a group of NRFM representatives and local branch leaders met with the NALC president in Washington, D.C. to convey the feelings of the members they represented in regard to the upcoming negotiations. The almost one hundred carrier representatives were from branches comprising more than two-thirds of the total NALC membership.

Job security was the top priority item projected by this group. The national president was informed that job security for letter carriers meant not only preservation of the contract's "no-layoff" clause but also protection of assignments and traditional craft functions. The local leaders cited postal management's "centralized mark-up" plan which would transfer the task of forwarding undeliverable mail from the letter carrier to the clerk craft as indicative of the need to negotiate work rules favorable to preserving the craft. The national union was inundated with grievances concerning the interpretation and application of the 1971 agreement, particularly the work rules. From July 21, 1971 through November 17, 1972, 11,709 grievances were filed, 95 percent by the clerks and letter carriers.¹

Shortly after the negotiations began, the national NALC president selected a ratification committee composed of twenty-two local union officials. A minority group on the committee supported by the increasingly well organized and expanding National Rank and File Movement, convinced the national leadership to submit any tentative agreement to the entire membership for ratification. The existing agreement was due to expire on July 20, 1973,

¹Ibid., p. 236.

and there were indications that the membership was becoming increasingly sympathetic to the NRFM's position of "no contract-no work." Reacting to the rising militancy of the postal workers and cognizant of the fact that any tentative agreement would be submitted to the NALC and APWU memberships for ratification, the parties agreed to a tentative contract on June 19, 1973. The agreement was immediately prepared in booklet form to be sent to the membership with a ballot upon which each member could indicate acceptance or rejection. The majority and minority reports of the ratification committee, which had approved the tentative agreement by a seventeen to five vote, were also sent to each member along with the ballot and the contract. With the national union leadership urging acceptance, the contract was approved by a vote of 119,922 to 21,958 among APWU members. Letter carriers accepted the agreement by a 93,216 to 41,454 vote.

Highlights of the agreement included: an immediate \$700 salary increase and a \$400 pay raise effective July 20, 1974; incorporation of the previous \$166 cost-of-living increase into the base yearly salary and an "uncapped" cost of living allowance (COLA) for the life of the contract; a breakthrough in fringe benefits, whereby the employer's share of health insurance payments would rise from 40 percent to 55 percent immediately, and increase to 65 percent in July, 1974; life insurance contri-

butions by the employer would go from 33 percent to 100 percent; retention of the no-layoff provision; a system of "expedited" arbitration for disciplinary cases; limitations on local negotiations to only twenty-two specific items.

The major points of opposition to the agreement were outlined in the minority report of the NALC ratification committee. They were:

1. The fact that letter carriers' positions were not protected and therefore thousands of routes would be eliminated through the centralized mark-up program
2. The lack of built-in protection against technological change
3. The dangers contained in the controversial Article XXXII, which would allow management to contract out carrier work
4. The lack of negotiated work rules as contained in the M-39 and other manuals
5. The non-attainment of an all regular work force
6. The inevitable inequities which would be produced because work on designated holidays would still be paid on a straight time basis
7. The fact that letter carriers would still be subject to suffer discipline prior to a hearing
8. The failure to obtain a better retirement

Alternative to limited
negotiations

Local negotiations as outlined in the 1973 National Agreement commenced on September 4 and proceeded much smoother than under the previous contract. The fact that the negotiable items were limited, undoubtedly contributed to the reduction of impasses. The experience most negotiators gained during the first round of local bargaining also helped expedite the process. Another important element in this improved labor relations atmosphere at the local level was the understanding reached between the parties which guaranteed that any item not agreed upon would remain in force as it appeared in the existing local agreement. While this provision protected those branches having substantial local contracts, it caused great concern among the many smaller branches where no local agreement existed. Ultimately, only a few hundred impasses were forwarded to the national level and those that proceeded to arbitration were heard as "class actions," i.e., applying to, or on behalf of, all branches having similar situations.

In N.Y.C., Branch 36 and the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union bemoaned the fact that local negotiations were limited. The unions were particularly concerned about impending technological changes and the effect such changes might have on employee classifications and work

assignments. Commenting on the subject, the Branch 36 president wrote: "For it is still our contention, as it has always been, that only when employees can bargain all terms and conditions of employment as it relates to everyday, human experience will we truly become a party to the collective bargaining process."¹ In an attempt to become a full partner in the bargaining process, Branch 36 formed the Greater New York Area Council, NALC, and petitioned the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to be certified as an appropriate unit for collective bargaining. In obtaining the required signatures, which amounted to 30 percent of the letter carriers in the N.Y. region, the council had to overcome the opposition of the national union and the competition of a rival carrier group. Actually, the rival council of letter carriers, led by the Brooklyn local president, who was also a member of the NALC's executive council, was designed to prevent Branch 36 from obtaining the required signatures, rather than for securing a petition for itself. Although the petition was ultimately rejected, it did proceed to a hearing of oral arguments by the petitioners and interveners before the full, five-member National Labor Relations Board. A similar petition filed on behalf of postal

¹Vincent R. Sombrotto, N.Y. Letter Carriers Outlook, Sept. 1973, pg. 2.

clerks in the N.Y. region by the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union was likewise rejected by the NLRB.

Conflict over
shift changes

The local union leaders criticism of the national agreement's failure to appropriately address the effects of technological change on the work force was highlighted in a dramatic confrontation which erupted on January 21, 1974, at the world's largest bulkmail facility in Secaucus, New Jersey. The dispute developed after hundreds of postal employees in the N.Y. area transferred to the new facility. Many of these workers transferred voluntarily, attracted in part by the relatively favorable work tours and days off scheduling which included Sundays off. The eruption came when postal management announced the following changes: the 7:00 A.M.-3:30 P.M. tour would become a 10:15 A.M.-6:45 P.M. tour, and the 3:15 P.M.-11:45 P.M. tour would be changed to a 7:00 P.M.-3:30 A.M. tour. Further, weekend work would be increased and a Sunday work schedule would begin. The union, MBPU, argued that the shift changes created an unreasonable and for some employees, an unresolvable transportation burden. While the day shift would now have to face extremely heavy traffic both getting to and from work, those employees leaving the facility at 3:30 A.M. would have no public transportation available to them. This would necessitate

private automobile transportation at a time when gasoline was in short supply.

The confrontation came on January 21, 1974, the date postal management chose to implement the new shifts. The postal workers, under instruction from the union, arrived at 7:00 A.M., their usual shift. Management, however, refused to allow the employees to enter the facility. A similar situation occurred later in the day when employees whose work shift had been 3:15 P.M. were denied access to the postal premises. Thus began a complete shutdown of the two-thousand-employee facility, a shutdown that would last through four full days commencing January 21-24. Postal management referred to the shutdown as an illegal job action while the local union called it a lockout. The national office of the American Postal Workers Union termed the conflict no more than a demonstration and refused to involve itself in the dispute. In N.Y.C. postal employees began to rally to the support of the New Jersey workers. Carloads of clerks and carriers from Branch 36 and MBPU arrived on the scene to bolster the picket lines. The Branch 36 president, who was at the bulk mail facility when the conflict began, was issued a court order restraining him from any involvement in the crisis. Believing that the confrontation could easily spread to the N.Y.C. post offices, the carrier leader called for a special meeting of the Branch 36 board of officers. On

January 22, Branch 36 posted a bulletin in every post office in Manhattan and the Bronx indicating total support for the New Jersey workers. Unlike the postal strike of 1970, the conflict at the bulk facility was marred by violence. Picketing postal workers clashed with postal security guards and inspectors as well as with local police. Several demonstrators were arrested and the USPS promised to bring both civil and administrative actions against the workers as well as the union. The conflict ended only after U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence A. Whipple ordered restoration of the original shifts pending ultimate determination through arbitration. Postal workers viewed the settlement as a victory over postal management, a victory obtained through direct action and without the support of the national union leadership. Once again focus would be placed upon changing that leadership.

NRFM candidates defeated

The 1974 NALC convention convened in Seattle, Washington, on August 12. The national leadership, choosing to be in the forefront of the inevitable democratization of the union, stole the thunder from the National Rank and File Movement by proposing referendum voting for national and regional elections as well as for contract ratification. For the first time in the history of the NALC, candidates were nominated at the convention and then elected by the

one man-one vote process. The National Rank and File Movement put forth a complete slate of candidates in opposition to the incumbent officers. More than 120,000 votes were cast in the general election. The president of Branch 36, was defeated by a two-to-one vote ratio in his bid to unseat the incumbent NALC president, James H. Rademacher. The closest NREFM victory was in the race for assistant secretary treasurer, where Vernon Harris, president of the Boston branch, lost to Alfred K. May by less than twelve thousand votes. May became the first black national resident NALC officer.

Split in Branch 36
Rank and File

Although the N.Y. Rank & File was virtually unanimous in its support of the Branch 36 president's bid for national NALC president, a serious split developed over the election for regional business agent. On one side of the split was the Branch 36 president who felt the position should not be opposed because all energies and resources were needed to support his own bid for national president. On the other side of the issue was the executive vice president of Branch 36, who agreed that the president should be supported in his bid for the national presidency, but also believed a strong Rank and File candidate should seek the important position of regional business agent. The branch president was inflexible. He

threatened to withdraw as the Rank and File candidate for national president if the executive vice president of Branch 36 opposed the national union's candidate for regional business agent. The issue was ultimately resolved when the executive vice president withdrew as a candidate. A New Jersey letter carrier ultimately vied with the Brooklyn carriers' union president for the position, but was virtually unknown and never had much of a chance in the election. He was defeated by an almost three to one margin. By November, 1974, when nominations for local union office were due, the Branch 36 Rank and File was divided into two separate camps. One faction, which supported the president, was seen as more cautious and conservative than the other group which rallied around the executive vice president. When all attempts at reconciliation failed both the Branch 36 president and executive vice president accepted nominations for the office of president.

The two candidates fielded a complete slate of nineteen officers. Each group considered itself as representing the Branch 36 Rank and File. In fact, the party was split almost evenly. The president, however, had formed a coalition with many of the previous administration's supporters. Some were on his slate while others were given jobs in the credit union and welfare fund. In January 1975, the branch president's entire slate was

elected by a three to two margin.¹ For all practical purposes, this marked the end of the Branch 36 Rank & File.

Demise of the National Rank and File Movement

Before the 1975 contract negotiations began, the National Rank & File Movement had also been virtually swept aside. In its place as an alternative voice to the incumbent NALC leadership was the Committee of Presidents, a group of local leaders dominated by Rademacher supporters but including and somewhat influenced by former members of the National Rank & File Movement. In supporting and becoming involved with the Committee of Presidents, while abandoning the National Rank and File Movement, the Branch 36 president's strategy was designed to influence and win over those people already in office, as opposed to electing new and sympathetic local leadership. The president of the Philadelphia branch was elected chairman of the Committee. This man, a progressive leader with strong ties to the National Rank and File

¹Actually, the winning ticket failed to field a candidate for one of the minor positions on the board of officers. This oversight allowed a candidate from the other slate to be elected. The carrier, however, refused to serve in the administration and was replaced by a presidential appointee.

Movement, had been elected branch president following a campaign which emphasized the incumbent's lack of leadership during the 1970 strike. While he was in agreement with most of the National Rank and File Movement's proposals for union reform, he did not share its hostility toward the national president, and in fact, had, much to the Movement's chagrin, cast his branch's proxy votes at the 1972 convention for Rademacher, not the NRFM's candidate.

1975 contract negotiations

The 1975 national contract negotiations began in April. The unions once again united in a coordinated bargaining committee similar to CAPE in the previous negotiations. This time, however, the group called itself the Postal Coordinated Bargaining Committee. As in the previous contract talks, the same outside consultant was hired to represent the unions as chief negotiator. The issue receiving the most attention was that of job-security. Letter carriers were particularly upset about a new delivery system being tested by postal management. The Letter Carrier Route Evaluation System (LCRES) also called the "Kokomo Plan" because it was being tested in Kokomo, Indiana, was a computerized time and motion study designed to increase productivity. The letter carriers saw the plan as a management method to eliminate jobs.

At the December 12, 1974 membership meeting of Branch 36, the following motion was passed unanimously:

If the Kokomo Plan (computerization of routes) is implemented anywhere in this country and the National Association of Letter Carriers does not call for a nationwide strike, the leadership of Branch 36 will call for an immediate strike vote and recommend a strike action be taken¹

The national NALC president also issued a strike threat relevant to the Kokomo Plan. On January 16, 1975, the following statement by Rademacher received national attention: "This is not an idle threat, if they put that plan into effect and eliminate 15,000 jobs, we walk out."² At the March membership meeting of Branch 36 following discussion on the possible effects of the Kokomo Plan on letter carrier assignments, the members in attendance unanimously adopted a resolution creating a two thousand dollar monthly strike fund. As the negotiations dragged along with no noticeable progress, the possibility of a postal strike increased. On Wednesday, May 14, Rademacher stated "that he did not expect his members, the letter carriers to work after July 20 if no contract had been signed."³

¹"We Are People-Not Robots," N.Y. Letter Carriers' Outlook, Dec. 1974, pg. 1.

²"Mailmen's Union Threatens Strike," N.Y. Daily News, Jan. 17, 1975, pg. 36.

³Holsendolph, Ernest, "Time Is Running Out in Wage Talks for 600,000 Postal Workers," N.Y. Times, May 15, 1975, pg. 26.

Rademacher's "no contract-no work" declaration was taken a step further by the Branch 36 president. Speaking to a group of more than three thousand postal workers who had gone to Washington, D.C. on June 19 to protest against the lack of progress in the negotiations, he declared:

It's not just "no contract-no work," it's no good contract-no work. If they think they can give us and send down just any garbage and call it a contract, they'd better start worrying right now about what we're going to do. Nobody looks forward to going on strike, nobody loves to strike, but if that's what it takes, that's what we'll do.¹

On July 2, Rademacher repeated his "no contract-no work" pledge in a national bulletin which headlined postal management's intention to speed-up time-and-work standards while insisting on the right to layoff excess workers.² On July 8, in Manhattan and the Bronx, demonstrating postal workers marched in front of the General Post Offices echoing the promise of "no contract-no work" on July 21. On July 10, the national negotiations reached an absolute stalemate. Two days later, William J. Usery, Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service entered the negotiations. Usery's involvement and a series of around-the-clock bargaining sessions led to an agreement which was reached two hours after the existing contract was scheduled to expire. An agreement between the

¹"Mass Demonstration" New York Letter Carriers' Outlook, June 1975, pg. 1.

²NALC Bulletin, July 2, 1975.

parties to "stop the clock" at midnight July 20, served to keep the existing contract in force and prevented a no contract-no work situation from developing.

Highlights of the 1975 National Agreement, a three year as opposed to the usual two year contract included:

1. An immediate \$400 salary increase; a \$250 increase in March 1976; another \$250 in November 1976; and a \$600 pay raise July 1977
2. Continuation of the "uncapped" cost of living allowance with the previous two years accumulation of \$1,310 rolled into the basic salary scale
3. Retention of the no-layoff clause
4. Increase in the employer's contribution to health benefit insurance from 65 to 75 percent of the premium
5. Continuation of the provision allowing for local negotiations
6. Prevention of any changes in time-and-work standards that the union feels are improper unless an arbitrator finds them to be fair, reasonable and equitable

Opposition to the contract focused on: the "meager" wage increase--"only" \$1,500 over three years; the fact that the contract was extended from two to three years; failure to fully prevent management from implementing new work standards; minimum work guarantees for substitute

employees; failure to obtain an all regular work force; increase in the number of days a temporary employee can be hired from 89 to 180; Article XXXII which would allow postal management the right to sub-contract craft work. In N.Y.C., MBPU and Branch 36 urged rejection of the contract.

The NALC Committee of Presidents in a fifty-three to eleven vote also opposed acceptance of the Agreement. Rademacher, while urging that the contract be ratified, seemed to simultaneously be apologizing for the Agreement. Shortly after negotiations concluded, the NALC president released the following statement:

...."the mountain had labored and produced a mouse." It is more evident than ever that postal workers must achieve the right to strike so that never again will they be placed in the position union leaders found themselves at the hour of expiration of the 1973-75 National Agreement. The only possible hope for the future of postal workers is to go to the bargaining table with all the rights that are enjoyed by workers in the private sector, including the critical right to withhold services when a dispute exists.¹

Among members of the American Postal Workers Union Bargaining Advisory Committee, the vote was 37 to 12 in favor of accepting the contract. The final decision on the tentative agreement was made by the rank and file postal workers. Letter carriers voted to accept the contract by a 90,023 to 44,679 margin. Members of the APWU approved the Agreement 125,686 to 37,357. Local negotiations were

¹NALC Bulletin, July 21, 1975.

conducted during the month of October and concluded with little fanfare. Once again limited to 22 items, with assurances that all existing agreements would remain in effect, only a small number of impasses reached the national level.

NALC succession politics

With contract negotiations out of the way for the next three years, attention turned toward the implementation of the Agreement, particularly in the area of time and work standards. In September, the NALC requested arbitration to determine if postal management would be allowed to implement the Kokomo Plan as intended at a post office in Portland, Oregon on October 9. The case, first presented on November 20, 1975, dragged on for months. It was not until August 6, 1976, that the arbitrator, Sylvester Garrett issued his decision upholding the NALC contention that the standards postal management intended to implement under the plan "could not be met by any significant number of presently qualified carriers, now in the work force, who put forth reasonable effort in the performance of their duties."¹ The decision was a significant victory for Rademacher, who had been subjected to severe criticism within the NALC for relying on arbitration to resolve a

¹Joseph J. Lowenberg, "The U.S. Postal Service," Collective Bargaining: Contemporary American Experience, Gerald G. Somers, Ed., Industrial Relations Research Association Series, (Bloomington, Ill. Pantagraph Printing, 1980), p. 476.

situation his detractors felt should have been settled at the bargaining table, but it came too late to be of any political benefit to him personally. On May 21, 1976, the NALC president announced that he would not be a candidate for reelection. Rademacher's decision to retire was based on increasing pressure from what he termed an "unhappy membership," strong competition from the Branch 36 president, and lack of support from other national officers.¹

By June, three candidates had declared themselves. The first to announce was the Branch 36 president, who had accepted a draft from the committee of presidents almost a month preceding Rademacher's announced intention forfeiting reelection. Following Rademacher's announcement, NALC executive vice president, J. Joseph Vacca, and NALC director of city delivery, Gustave J. Johnson declared themselves candidates. Johnson, the former Branch 36 president and Rademacher's preferred successor, eventually withdrew as a presidential candidate and accepted the position of secretary treasurer on the Vacca slate. Ultimately, three candidates were nominated for the office of NALC president.

The insurgent slate, calling itself The Carriers' Candidates, fielded challengers for ten of the twelve

¹Ernest Holsendolph, "Postal Service Now Facing Union Leadership Struggle," N.Y. Times, May 30, 1976, pg. 1.

national union positions choosing not to contest for the office of executive vice president and director of health insurance. The slate also endorsed candidates for business agent in ten of the fifteen regional elections. While the incumbents' campaign emphasized the gains in salary and the need for experienced leadership, the insurgents pointed to the increasing pressure from postal management, the declining service and subsequent tarnished image of letter carriers, the reduction in the work force, coupled with the elimination of delivery routes, backlogged grievance procedures, and lack of benefits for substitutes and retirees.

In a surprisingly close election in which almost 120,000 ballots were cast, Vacca defeated the insurgent by only 5,175 votes. The third candidate, received 5,636 votes. The insurgent slate, however, did win two national offices. The Philadelphia branch president was elected to the office of assistant secretary-treasurer and the recently elected president of the Boston branch was successful in his bid to become one of three national trustees. Two national business agents on the insurgent slate were elected, as was the Brooklyn branch president who had both of the leading candidates' endorsement. Elected on the Vacca slate was Joseph H. Johnson, a former national business agent who vied for the position of city delivery director. That position had been filled by

Gus Johnson who now was the newly elected secretary-treasurer. With the defeat of the incumbent assistant secretary-treasurer, Joseph H. Johnson became the only black national NALC officer.

The new administration took office on January 29, 1977, promising to achieve an all regular work force for letter carriers. In April 1977, a slate of incumbent Branch 36 officers issued a resounding defeat to a poorly organized opposition group of carriers. The incumbent slate, claiming to represent the original Rank & File movement of Branch 36 received five times as many votes as the opposition in the branch's first mail ballot election. The five thousand votes cast was a thousand more than in any previous election and reflected the tremendous percentage of participation by retired members, few of whom had voted under the machine balloting system. The adaption of the mail voting procedure and the enormous rate of participation by retired members¹ greatly enhanced the political strength of the incumbents. The Branch 36 Rank & File now had more significance as an historical reference than as a political force within the union.

¹Approximately sixteen hundred of the slightly more than eighteen hundred retired members participated in the election.

Carriers quit coalition

On the national scene, the committee of presidents resumed meeting. On April 15, in Kansas City, Missouri, representatives from ninety branches and state associations gathered to discuss the current status and future direction of the NALC. For the first time since its inception in 1973, the committee was addressed by a NALC national president. Discussion centered around the 1978 contract negotiations. Vacca told the group that the NALC was withdrawing from the Postal Coordinated Bargaining Committee and that the unions' chief negotiator for each of the three previous contracts would not be rehired. The feeling was that the carriers could do better at the bargaining table by representing themselves instead of being tied to a chief negotiator who was obliged to represent the interests of all postal crafts. On April 17, Francis S. Filbey, General-President of the American Postal Workers Union, died. His successor, Emmet Andrews, APWU's director of industrial relations, was elected by the union's national executive board on May 23, 1977. The unions continued to interact under the Postal Labor Negotiating Committee (PLNC) which was designed as a forum for exchanging ideas and developing basic positions relevant to the bargaining process. In August, the PLNC met with senior staff members of the USPS to discuss views and to establish preliminary policies for the 1978 negotiations. In September,

a national NALC "rap session," mandated by the previous convention, was held in Washington, D.C. More than three hundred representatives participated in a four-hour question and answer session with the entire board of national officers. The NALC officials were bombarded with an onslaught of questions concerning the contract negotiations. Issues receiving the most attention included: job security, wages and the cost of living allowance (COLA), work rules, and the grievance procedure. In November, the National Rural Letter Carriers Association separated from the PLNC. The remaining committee members established a communications committee for the purpose of keeping their members as informed as possible concerning the negotiations. The increased awareness, communications, and involvement of postal workers, accompanied by the changes in national union leadership promised to add a new dimension to the collective bargaining process.

Ominous 1978 negotiations

Neither the postal unions nor the USPS experienced a good year in 1977. Total employment, which was down by more than 10 percent since 1970, had experienced its greatest decrease in 1976 and 1977. In spite of the reduction in its workforce, the USPS had accumulated a deficit of \$3.5 billion by the end of fiscal 1977.¹

¹Joseph J. Lowenberg, Collective Bargaining, p. 439.

The number of grievances appealed to step four of the negotiated procedure had risen from less than 5,000 per year under the 1971 agreement to almost 10,000 in 1976 and 1977.¹ For the unions, the grievance procedure was particularly distressing. The NALC "...reported that it lost 87 percent of 3,022 discipline cases arbitrated between July 1975 and May 1977."² Despite a somewhat adversarial relationship, the postal unions and the USPS were joined together in attempts to defeat legislation which would have a devastating effect on the postal service. During the first three months of the Ninety-fifth Congress, more than fifteen bills sought repeal of the postal monopoly on first class letters.³

On January 26, 1978, the NALC, APWU and LIUNA sponsored a joint legislative conference in Washington, D.C. More than thirty five hundred delegates attended the conference which highlighted support of continued postal subsidies and opposition to reductions in mail services. Collective bargaining had quite obviously not brought an end to the need for intensive lobbying efforts from the postal unions.

The NALC committee of presidents met in Memphis, Tennessee on February 9-10. More than one hundred branch

¹Ibid., p. 473. ²Ibid., p. 475. ³Ibid., p. 481.

presidents and a dozen state presidents gathered to hear the NALC president and twelve national officers speak on the upcoming negotiations. The Branch 36 president chaired the meeting, at which information was exchanged during the president's presentation and discussion period. However, Vacca failed to satisfactorily respond to the two questions uppermost in the minds of the audience. Vacca stated that he would not disclose the NALC proposals because he had a "secret plan." Next, in response to the inquiry concerning what course of action he would take if there was no agreement at the expiration date of the current contract, Vacca replied that he was optimistic and if things didn't work out, he would tell them his plans at some future date. The local presidents were disappointed with the NALC president's answers, especially in view of his promise to improve communications and run an open administration. Most, however, agreed that the "bottom line" would be the quality of the contract.

Negotiations between the USPS and the Postal Labor Negotiating Committee began on April 20, 1978. The parties agreed to devote the first thirty days of negotiations to craft items only. Negotiations concerning general contract terms would begin on May 22, unless changed by mutual agreement. With no information coming from the national union offices, and the existing contract due to

expire in eight days, the presidents of MBPU and Branch 36 led a contingent of concerned postal workers to Washington, D.C. on July 12. More than five thousand postal employees demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the state of negotiations outside USPS headquarters. The throng of marchers bore the message "no contract July 20--no work." On July 19, a similar demonstration was held outside the regional offices of the USPS at the Manhattan GPO. Two days earlier, Postmaster General, William Bolger, had sent a letter to every postal employee in the country warning of the consequences a strike action would invoke. No fear from the Postmaster General's letter, threatening anyone who struck against the USPS with loss of job and possible jail sentence, was evident at the July 19 rally. Meanwhile, in Washington, Wayne Horvitz, Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, had entered into the negotiations.

At 11:59 P.M. on July 20, 1978, the negotiators agreed to "stop the clock." Approximately four hours later, the parties reached a tentative agreement. The three-year contract produced:

1. An immediate 2 percent wage increase, an additional 3 percent in July 1979, and a 5 percent raise in July 1980
2. "Rolling in" of the previous contract's cost of living increases which amounted to \$1,518, to the

base salary schedule

3. Continuation of the COLA increases, but with a "cap," limiting the maximum for the life of the contract to no more than \$1,518
4. Retention of the no-layoff clause.

Contract opposition

Critics of the tentative agreement were relentless and lashed out immediately. The official publication of Branch 36 doubled its usual monthly circulation and sent out twenty-one thousand copies of the Outlook, urging rejection of the contract. The front page story blasted the agreement for containing wage increases that were below the national standard and the rate of inflation. The article further denounced the contract as an "outrage and an insult." It compared the wage increases with those given N.Y.C. employees the previous month and concluded that "even with New York City's "edge of bankruptcy" labor settlement last month, it is apparent that the postal settlement is the employer victory of the year." The article criticized the presentation of the agreement to the membership, referring to it as "the most dishonest representation of all," and "an attempt to take credit for something they should hide from in shame." The author of the article, the Branch 36 president further explained:

The 19.5% includes projected COLA payments up to their maximum. The only time it is legitimate to count COLA as a new benefit is the first time it is negotiated. COLA has been in our past three contracts. It is not a new benefit. To take credit for the fact that it continues is pure and simple "hogwash."¹

Sombrotto concluded with an attack on the capping of the COLA increases, calling it a "give-back," and a series of figures showing how the contract's inability to keep pace with the projected inflation rate guaranteed an erosion of postal workers' real wages over the next three years.

Walkout at bulk-mail centers

The most volatile protest against the tentative agreement occurred on July 22, when postal workers at the bulk mail facility in Jersey City walked off their jobs. They were followed almost immediately by workers at the Meadows facility in Kearney, New Jersey. Similar walkouts took place at the San Francisco bulk mail center in Richmond, California and the Washington bulk mail center in Largo, Maryland. The scattered strikes which lasted for three days, involved approximately five thousand postal employees. A leaflet distributed by the strikers explained some of the reasons behind their action:

¹Vincent R. Sombrotto, "Contract-UGH!!! Worst Contract in 1978," New York Letter Carriers' Outlook, Jul-Aug., 1978, pg. 1.

We knew from experience that unless we, as rank and file members, walked out, management and the National Unions would work together to make ratification of the sellout contract a sure thing.
....We had hoped for support from other locals, especially New York City, that would lead to a nationwide strike for a new contract¹

Postal management moved quickly against the relatively small band of disorganized and isolated strikers, firing 200, suspending 116 without pay for 2 to 4 week periods and issuing 2,500 letters of warning.

Political reaction to
the tentative agreement

The majority of activists opposed to the tentative agreement were busily organizing for a rejection of the contract through formal process. The NALC national convention convened in Chicago, Illinois on July 31, the same day the ratification ballots were mailed to the membership. On the first day of convention more than four thousand delegates overwhelmingly voted to recommend non-ratification of the proposed contract. The convention also voted unanimous support for amnesty for the fired postal workers. Candidates for national office were nominated during the convention's third day. Nominated for NALC president were Vincent Sombrotto and J. Joseph Vacca. Joining Sombrotto on the "100 Percent Leaders"

¹"BMC WORKERS FOR A GOOD CONTRACT," August 1978 (handout distributed by strikers).

slate was Ronald Hughes, the Boston branch president who had been elected national trustee on the Sombrotto slate in the previous election. Hughes was pitted against Tom Riley, the only other insurgent elected in the 1976 election, for the position of assistant secretary treasurer. Riley, in choosing to support Vacca and his slate of candidates, had become a "traitor" in the eyes of the insurgents and thus was singled out for defeat. The Sombrotto slate chose not to oppose the executive vice president, Tony Huerta; the vice president, Frank Connors; the secretary treasurer, Gus Johnson; and the director of city delivery, Joseph Johnson. Three incumbent national officers announced their retirements. Candidates from both slates vied for the positions they vacated--director of life insurance, director of health insurance and assistant director of health insurance, as did a number of independents. The Sombrotto slate also fielded candidates for the position of director of MBA/NSBA, director of retirees, board of trustees (3), and three of the fifteen national business agent slots. The unopposed national officers, along with the three retiring union officials, formed "The Committee to Re-elect the Vacca Team."

On the fifth and final day of convention, the NALC delegates overrode the committee of laws' recommendation and adopted a new amendment to the national constitution.

The provision, which eliminated the requirement of a referendum vote before declaring a strike, read as follows:

....When the majority of total votes cast is for rejection, the NALC negotiators shall inform the USPS and reopen negotiations within five (5) days after the vote is tallied. If negotiations are not reopened there will be an immediate work stoppage. If negotiations are reopened, they will not exceed a period of fifteen (15) calendar days, at which time a second ballot shall be mailed to each member for ratification or rejection. If the membership rejects this second ballot then the National President is mandated to call an immediate work stoppage.¹

APWU convention

Ten days after the close of the letter carriers convention, the APWU national convention was called to order in Denver, Colorado. When the general president, Emmett Andrews, was introduced, pandemonium broke out. Almost twenty-seven hundred delegates banged chairs and tin cans, flashed signs protesting the tentative agreement, and demanded defeat of their president. When discussion finally began on the contract, a motion to reject the tentative agreement was ruled out of order by Andrews. The general president was overruled by the body with an eight to one vote approving the motion to reject the contract.

¹Convention Chronicle 51st Biennial Convention
National Association of Letter Carriers, Bulletin No. 5,
August 4, 1978, pg. 2.

Arbitrator issues award

On August 23, 1978 results of the NALC contract vote showed that the letter carriers had rejected the tentative agreement 78,288-58,832.¹ NALC president Vacca immediately informed the Postmaster General of the rejection and requested that negotiations be reopened within five days. Joining Vacca in an attempt to have the USPS return to the bargaining table were the national director of the Mail Handler's Union (LIUNA) and the APWU general president, Andrews. The tentative agreement had also been rejected by the membership of LIUNA and the APWU. On August 26, a federal district judge issued a temporary restraining order enjoining the unions from participating in any strike action. A copy of the order was served on every postal union office in the country. On August 28, agreement to resume negotiations was reached between USPS and the unions. The negotiations, which began on September 1, continued for fifteen days under the auspices of James J. Healy, a Harvard professor appointed as mediator by the director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. When the fifteen days of bargaining expired and the parties were unable to reach an agreement, Healy issued a binding resolution. Basically, Healy's award sanctioned all terms of the tentative

¹NALC Bulletin, August 23, 1978.

agreement except Article IX--wages and Article VI--no layoff. The latter was modified to provide "lifetime" no-layoff protection for employees on the payroll as of the date of the award, September 15, 1978. Employees hired after that date would receive the same job security only after completing six years of service. Healy adjusted the wage increases to provide an immediate five hundred dollar pay raise, a 3 percent increase in July 1979, and a five hundred dollar salary rise in July 1980. Most important to the incomes of postal workers was Healy's "uncapping" of the COLA pay adjustments.

Incumbents pay for
poor contract

The incumbents' campaign for national office in the NALC once again presented them as "experienced" leaders. The insurgents, meanwhile, were calling for "real" leadership. Their campaign literature constantly criticized the contract, labeled themselves "100 percent leaders," and asked the membership to "throw the 2 percenters out--now!" The 2 percent was a reference to the size of the pay increase accepted by the NALC president during negotiations. The rejection of the tentative agreement by the general membership greatly enhanced the effect of the insurgents' campaign. Adding immeasurable stature and undoubtedly influencing many voters, particu-

larly among the forty thousand retired NALC members, was an endorsement of Sombrotto by the past national president, James R. Rademacher, in a letter sent to every NALC member. In one of those strange political turnarounds, Rademacher's letter read: "It is time for a change--a change to Vincent R. Sombrotto! I heartily recommend that you vote for him for President for the sake of the Union--and for your own!" Balloting concluded on September 27 and the tabulation began the following day. The final tally, officially certified on October 10, showed Sombrotto the winner with 75,137 votes to Vacca's 43,407. Twelve of the thirteen candidates on the Sombrotto slate were also victorious. Only in the election for national business agent in the Boston region did a Sombrotto-supported candidate fail to get elected. Sombrotto received a majority in every one of the fifteen NALC regions. Calling his election "a mandate for a sweeping new approach to the problems of letter carriers--and mail service to the public," Sombrotto declared that he "would dedicate his term of office to the spirit of a revitalized labor union movement." In an interview shortly after his election as national NALC president,

Sombrotto announced that one of his goals would be "to complete the association's metamorphosis from a lobbying group into a trade union. Lobbying," Sombrotto said, "is collective begging, instead of collective bargaining."¹

Despite his opinion of lobbying, it was not long after his installation as national NALC president on January 20, 1979, that Sombrotto launched one of the greatest lobbying campaigns in the history of the postal unions. Using the acronym WAR, Sombrotto set out to raise one million dollars in order to "Win-A-Sure Retirement" for letter carriers. The money was necessary, Sombrotto explained, "to wage war on those who would destroy the Civil Service retirement fund."²

Sombrotto's concern was caused by a number of bills introduced into the Ninety-sixth Congress calling for a merger of the Social Security and Civil Service retirement funds. During his first few months in office, the new NALC president found himself testifying before House and Senate Committees on such issues as Social Security and Civil Service retirement, occupational health and safety, cost-of-living allowances for retirees, and electronic transference of mail. To strengthen the lobbying

¹Kenneth C. Crowe, "Mr. Sombrotto Goes to Washington," Newsday, October 25, 1978, pg. 23.

²NALC Bulletin, October 29, 1979.

arm of the NALC, Sombrotto hired George Gould, a veteran congressional staff member, as legislative assistant. In November 1979, the first issue of a new quarterly NALC publication, Capitol Notes, was sent to every union member. The entire paper was devoted to encouraging NALC members and their spouses to support the lobbying efforts of the national union. Lobbying for the postal unions was obviously flourishing, once again, under the new NALC administration.

APWU president survives

In the APWU, political opposition to the incumbent administration was strong but unsuccessful. In a three way race for the office of general president, the incumbent, Emmett Andrews, polled 47,189 votes. His closest challenger, John R. Napurano, president of the North Jersey, APWU received 36,684 votes while the third candidate, William N. Odom, president of the Memphis, Tennessee local, was named on 13,369 ballots. The fact that Andrews had been elected with less than a majority of the votes cast raised a question of his ability to bring unity to the embattled union as well as his vulnerability in future elections. The most significant candidate to be elected was Kenneth Leiner, who won the office of National Mail Handler Vice President by 104 votes. Leiner, who was one of the postal workers fired

for striking at the New Jersey bulk mail facility, was awaiting final determination of his appeal by an arbitrator. Pending the arbitrator's decision, Leiner would remain on the rolls as a postal employee but in a non-pay status. Although he was a shop steward in the Metropolitan Area Local of APWU,¹ Leiner was not supported in his bid for election by the N. Y. Metro Area Local's president, Moe Biller. While sympathetic toward Leiner in his plight as a fired striker and himself a leader in the struggle to achieve amnesty for all the dismissed workers, Biller viewed Leiner as a "radical" and "troublemaker" within the union.

The fired strikers

The most prominent postal conflict of 1979 involved the workers fired during the 1978 contract protest. On the first anniversary of the strike, July 21, 1979, two dozen of the fired workers erected a "tent city" on the grounds of the bulk mail facility in Jersey City. For two weeks the fired workers occupied "Bolgerville," named after the Postmaster General, William Bolger, who had ordered the firings. The protest, peaceful throughout,

¹The New York Metro Area Postal Union, formerly the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union (MBPU), changed its name after attaining jurisdiction to represent employees at the New Jersey bulk mail facilities in 1972.

received much public attention but failed to soften the position of postal management toward the dismissed workers. Conflict within the APWU reached a new peak on June 25, 1979. After receiving an arbitrator's decision dated June 5, 1979, which sustained the discharge of Kenneth Leiner from the postal service for his involvement in the 1978 strike, national APWU president, Emmett Andrews expelled Leiner from the union, effective June 29, 1979, thus removing him from his elected office as national mail handler vice president.

Andrew's expulsion of Leiner sent shock waves throughout the union. Objections to Leiner's ouster came from regional officials, local presidents, rank and file members, and national officers. The question of amnesty for the fired workers had caused a furor throughout the APWU that seemed to pale in comparison to the dissatisfaction engendered by Andrew's removal of Leiner. The issue of the fired workers, which had been slowly subsiding, surfaced once again as union officers and activists perceived the firing of Leiner and his subsequent removal from union office as a threat to their own security. Even officers and members who had opposed Leiner politically rallied to support his right to remain an elected union official.

Tragedy at bulk
mail facility

On December 15, 1979, tragedy struck at the bulk mail facility in New Jersey. Michael McDermott, a twenty-five year-old mailhandler was crushed to death by a conveyor belt utilized in the processing of parcel post. Investigation showed that postal management had ignored safety hazard reports and decided on a policy of productivity over safety at the bulk facility. McDermott's death could have been avoided if the belt's protective guards and jam switches had not been removed by management in an attempt to increase production. The issue of health and safety which had always been a priority item at the bulk mail centers but less important to the majority of postal workers, was suddenly catapulted to the forefront of postal problems. In a prophetic article examining the bulk mail facilities, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson wrote: "The places simply are not safe to work in."¹ Anderson's article was especially critical of postal management's response to employee injuries which, according to Anderson, blamed the workers and not the machines. In support of his criticism of postal management, Anderson cited a memo from the manager of the San Francisco bulk facility which read: "We cannot continue

¹Jack Anderson, "Bulk Mail Centers Can Be Hazardous to Employee Health," Newsday, March 7, 1979, pg. 54.

to permit people to harm themselves at this installation. It is in their best interest to remove them from the Postal Service rather than allow them to maim or kill themselves."¹ The article went on to describe conditions at the Washington bulk mail center, where according to Anderson 345 accidents had occurred during 1978. The accident rate of 41.4 per 100 employees at the bulk center was compared to the 9.5 rate at the city post office in downtown Washington, D.C.² The year, 1979, ended with another postal worker, a clerk, Frank McGhee, narrowly escaping death after his apron got caught in a mail sorting machine. For the USPS, 1979 was a year of record profits. The first recorded profit in thirty-four years. For the postal unions, 1979 was a year which forecast a major issue for postal workers in the 1980s, namely, health and safety.

Postal unions and the
issues of the 1980s

The major legislative issues facing postal workers as the 1980s began were outlined in the February issue of the NALC publication, Capitol Notes. These included: H.R.79 Postal Reform, a bill providing public service funding sufficient to insure six day mail delivery; the continued operation of small post offices; presidential

¹Ibid. ²Ibid.

appointment of the Postmaster General, with Senate confirmation; H.R.826 OSHA Bill, designed to bring the Postal Service under most provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act; Social Security merger with the Civil Service retirement fund; electronic mail, wherein the unions were urging a major role for the Postal Service in the electronic transfer of messages. Other issues concerning the postal unions were the growing backlog of federal employee compensation cases and the lawsuit regarding the USPS violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Political issues were also surfacing within the postal unions. In the NALC, the question of union democracy and participation was raised after a special election committee appointed by NALC president Sombrotto and the committee of presidents recommended and endorsed a four-year term for national officers. Writing in support of the longer terms of office, and bolstering his argument with a cost savings factor, Sombrotto stated:

As I raise this issue, I do so in full awareness of the fact that I have been on the other side of this issue in the past and that talking about longer terms of office flies in the face of all the easy rhetoric about "democracy" and "participation" and all the other politically-smart slogans which have been used to support our historic two-year term of office....

When we add up the facts, the result is an extraordinarily expensive procedure which contributes to a highly-charged "political" atmosphere which dominates this union and drains the time and energy of officers at every level of Union away from doing what we should be doing - representing the best interests of Letter Carriers.¹

The ultimate decision on the longer terms of office would be made by the delegates to the NALC convention in August 1980.

NALC incumbents
solidify power

As the NALC convention scheduled for August 10-15 in Atlanta, Georgia was approaching, internal union politics resurfaced. Rumors were circulating that Sombrotto was going to be opposed as national president by either Gus Johnson or Joe Vacca. Just prior to the convention, the 1980 annual report of the National Right to Work Committee was cited by the Federal Times as containing a picture of Sombrotto and the head of the Right to Work Committee. The article, referring to Sombrotto, read that he "is given considerable credit for a right-to-work clause that was inserted in the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970."² Despite the rumors and the unfavorable press, no significant opposition to Sombrotto emerged

¹"presidents Report to Executive Council," The Postal Record, April 1980, pp. 6-7.

²"Grapevine." Federal Times, July 21, 1980, p. 2.

at the convention. Although his attempts to extend the terms of national officers from two to four years were defeated, Sombrotto appeared to be assured of continuing as national president. The letter carriers had elected him because they perceived the previous president as having failed to obtain a sufficient contract and most were anxious to have Sombrotto try his skill at the bargaining table in 1981. The convention began and ended with Sombrotto promising to call a nationwide strike if the 1981 negotiations did not produce a continuation of the "uncapped" COLA. The only position still voted on by proxies at the convention, resulted in the selection of the first female member of the NALC to an AFL-CIO delegate. Anita Guzik, of Farmington, Michigan, was one of six candidates elected to that position. Challenging Sombrotto for the office of national president were three virtually unknown and unorganized candidates. The vice president, Frank Connors and the director of city delivery were unopposed as were a number of national business agents, including Robert Vincenzi in the N.Y. region. The race that received the most attention was for the office of secretary-treasurer where Gus Johnson was opposed by Richard O'Connell, a former officer in the Vacca and Rademacher administrations. O'Connell was supported by Sombrotto, while Johnson received the endorsements of the two past presidents of the NALC. The election, viewed

as a test of Sombrotto's power within the union, resulted in Johnson's defeat by a 64,019 to 51,404 margin. All but one candidate, business agent in the Cincinnati Region, appearing on the Sombrotto-Huerta slate, were victorious. Sombrotto himself received 99,952 votes out of the 116,517 cast for the office of president.¹ The only person receiving more votes than Sombrotto was the executive vice president, who was opposed by only one candidate. Sombrotto's position as leader of the NALC and prominent spokesman for all postal unions was greatly enhanced by the election results.

Chicago clerks stop work
technology causes health
problems

While the condition of intraunion politics in the NALC appeared to be stabilizing, the situation in the APWU was becoming increasingly chaotic. Three weeks prior to the APWU national convention, a work stoppage over health and safety hazards took place at the world's largest post office building in Chicago, Illinois. The protest concerned the temperature on the work room floor. Prior to the incident, temperatures in Chicago had reached beyond the ninety degree mark for almost a week. On the day of the work stoppage the mercury had registered ninety-eight degrees and had not gone below

¹NALC Bulletin, No. 26, October 15, 1980.

eighty-two degrees. The average temperature and humidity rating had been ninety degrees and 74 percent respectively. Requests by employees for additional fans had been denied, and in spite of a number of grievances filed since the beginning of summer concerning the high temperatures and lack of fans, the actual number of fans in the work area had decreased. Although fifty fans would appear the day after the walkout, only nine fans were in place at the time of the work stoppage. While the immediate issue was the heat and humidity, an important related issue concerned technology. The work floor where the protest broke out contained twenty-two letter sorting machines and three optical scanners. The sorting machines are between fifty and seventy-five feet long and eight to ten feet high and wide. Each machine emits large amounts of heat. More than five hundred employees worked on the evening and morning shifts on the floor where the incident took place. The fact that the machines were blocking off many of the air conditioning vents and that the heat and humidity in the work area were extreme was acknowledged by postal management. The work stoppage which lasted only thirty-five minutes, resulted in the firing of seven APWU shop stewards. Thirty postal workers received suspensions of seven to fourteen days and almost three hundred were issued letters of warning. Informational picket lines and a series of labor-management meetings

failed to restore the fired union representatives to their jobs. As the APWU convention convened, formal appeals had been filed by the union on behalf of the discharged stewards who had come to be known as the "Chicago Seven."

APWU national leadership
split

The APWU convention was held in Detroit, Michigan, August 4 through August 8. The issue of the Chicago Seven received little attention. Highlights of the conclave included: a reduction in the fifty-two member governing council to a fourteen member body; extension of the terms of national officers from two to three years; rejection of a dues increase; establishment of a national women's committee to be known as POWER (Post Office Women for Equal Rights); restructuring of the National Rank and File Bargaining Committee, granting it full veto power over future National Agreements. The issue of amnesty for the fired workers was determined to be a "priority" in the upcoming contract negotiations with the USPS, while the question of Leiner's expulsion failed to receive consideration. While the union's position on these previously important issues seemed to be weakening, the emphasis on intraunion politics was increasing. A split among national officers resulted in three of them vying for the office of general president. Nominated

for the top post in the union was Moe Biller, president of the New York Metro Postal Union, and also coordinator for the northeast region of APWU. Nominations resulted in a large number of independent candidates and a few more splits among national officers. The Labor Department, which was overseeing the election because of irregularities in the 1978 voting, declared that Leiner, the fired worker and expelled national officer, was eligible to seek election so long as he was pursuing his case for reinstatement in the courts. Leiner was again nominated for the office of national mail handler vice president.

Results of the election astounded most postal political pundits. In the race for general president, Biller received 45,049 votes to 26,025 for Andrews.¹ Biller's running mates, Burrus and Richards, were elected, most other incumbent Washington based officers were re-elected, and a number of independents were also elected. These included Leiner, victor by seventy votes in the race for national mail handler vice president, Michael Zullo of the Queens Area Local, APWU, as director of research and education, and Roy Braunstein from the New Jersey Shore Area Local as legislative aide. Succeeding Biller as northeastern regional coordinator was Neal Vaccaro of the

¹"Biller Wins Presidency," The American Postal Worker, October 1980, p. 3.

of the N.Y. Metro Area Local. Vaccaro, with the support of the large N.Y. local, easily defeated his three opponents. Despite the emergence of the national women's group, POWER, as a formally recognized and active component of the APWU and the fact that women accounted for approximately one-third of the union's membership, no female candidate was elected to a national union position. Each of the four women seeking national office was defeated as was the one woman who vied for the position of national representative in the Philadelphia region. The most dramatic gain for women in the APWU resulted indirectly when Moe Biller, the president of the twenty thousand member N.Y. Metro Area Local, assumed the general presidency, the female executive vice president, Josie McMillian became his successor as president of the largest postal local in the country.

Leaders pledge solidarity

There was great expectation when the two "militant" leaders from New York became national presidents of the largest postal unions, and the 1981 negotiations for many promised to be the "armageddon" of all the postal conflicts yet. The leaders of the NALC and APWU were promising greater cooperation and more militancy than ever before. At their respective installations, Sombrotto and Biller pledged to call a nationwide strike if postal

management did not agree to an "uncapped" COLA in the 1981 contract. At his first general press conference on November 13, 1980, Biller reiterated his commitment to retaining the unlimited COLA, stating that "the union would press hard for more protection against work hazards that have recently resulted in two more deaths of union members."¹ Biller also promised to make improved provisions of the no-layoff clause and reinstated the fired workers. These objectives, according to Biller, would be "major bargaining issues in 1981. While the recently elected postal union leaders were preparing for what promised to be a critical year for postal workers, another newly elected administration was examining the postal service. John Ryan, a former chairman of the Postal Rate Commission, and head of Ronald Reagan's postal transition team, was advocating elimination of the private express statutes. The issue of electronic transfer of mail, the unions believed, was becoming inevitable and an issue considered essential by the unions to job security. Domination by the postal service was being seriously questioned by advisors to the new Republican president, and private management was being alternatively suggested.

¹"Effective Leadership Team Installed; Biller Outlines 1981 Bargaining Goals, The American Postal Worker, December 1980, p. 4.

APWU and NALC "raid"
Mailhandlers and
Rural Carriers

On January 8, 1981, the NALC and APWU formally agreed to create a joint bargaining committee for the national contract negotiations scheduled to begin in April. Although the Mailhandlers Union, LIUNA, did not participate at the meeting, an invitation was extended to have them join the committee. The Rural Letter Carriers were not invited to be part of the joint committee and it was not likely they would be asked because the NALC was involved in a major organizing drive directed at rural carriers. The organizing campaign developed after attempts to effect a merger of the two organizations had failed. The impetus to seek merger had come from a resolution adopted at the 1980 NALC convention. APWU was also involved in an organizing drive. The 1980 convention mandated the APWU to obtain a majority of the nation's mailhandlers as members. LIUNA represented about thirty-six thousand mailhandlers while only fifty-five hundred were members of APWU. The APWU attempt to organize the LIUNA members was a stumbling block to LIUNA's inclusion for joint negotiations with the NALC and APWU bargaining committee. Another problem created by the organizing drive of APWU involved the AFL-CIO. Because both APWU and LIUNA were affiliates of the AFL-CIO, each was bound by the federation's "no-raiding" policy. Basically,

the "no-raiding" policy meant no AFL-CIO affiliate could seek to organize members represented by another member of the federation. Biller, who had supported the resolution prior to his election ignored it after assuming the general presidency. Outvoted by the APWU Executive Board, Biller "allowed" rather than "encouraged" the continuation of the organizing drive. The half-hearted campaign ultimately failed, but the animosity created by the organizing attempt remained and contributed to LIUNA's decision to remain independent of the joint bargaining committee. The NALC forage into the ranks of the rural letter carriers did not involve the "no-raiding" policy of the AFL-CIO because the Rural Letter Carriers Association was not an affiliate of the labor federation. The NALC drive, however, was a dismal failure.

Pre-negotiations: Tactics
and strategies

Prior to the start of collective bargaining, the NALC committee of presidents voted to support the national leadership in any action deemed necessary concerning the negotiations. NALC president, Sombrotto, anticipating difficulty at the contract talks, appealed to the membership for support and unity. Linking the bargaining and legislative processes, Sombrotto stated:

....Legislation is as important to us as is bargaining - and, in fact, how strong we are on Capitol Hill will directly affect how strong we are at the

bargaining table. The future of the Postal Service and the future of collective bargaining depends directly, unequivocally and totally on the commitment we all make to NALC's legislative program.¹

The APWU, meanwhile, had convened its fourteen member Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee. Each committee person had been appointed by a member of the national executive board of APWU. Steve Albanese, president of the Boston APWU was elected chairperson. The committee comprised a cross section of crafts, represented each of the country's geographic regions, and was convened to develop proposals for the contract talks. The committee, vested with veto power over the negotiators, would decide whether the tentative agreement would be sent out to the membership for ratification or if the APWU negotiators would be returned to the bargaining table.

In April, Postmaster General, William F. Bolger, sent a letter to every postal employee advising the filing of a petition with the National Labor Relations Board by the Postal Service. The petition asked the NLRB to determine the unit appropriate for collective bargaining in the postal service. The action was brought about, wrote the postmaster general, because of the "increasing rivalry and dissention" and "jurisdictional disputes" of the postal

¹Vincent R. Sombrotto, "President's Point of View," The Postal Record, March 1981, p. 3.

unions. 'This factionalism, according to Bolger, had so complicated the bargaining structure "that it threatens to undermine successful contract negotiations before these negotiations have begun." Bolger went on to explain that the filing of the petition prevented the Postal Service from bargaining for a new contract pending determination of appropriate units by the NLRB. The postmaster general proposed that the current contract scheduled to expire on July 20, be extended, and he assured all employees that the no-layoff clause and cost-of-living increases would continue as well.¹

Biller and Sombrotto learned of the Postal Service's intention to petition the NLRB from members who had received the postmaster general's letter. Shocked and enraged at such an action occurring without notice and only seven days before the scheduled start of negotiations, the two union leaders issued the following joint statement to the press:

On behalf of a half-million postal workers, we are outraged by the Postmaster General's 11th-hour maneuver. It is the most deceitful act in the 10-year history of postal collective bargaining. It represents an utter contempt for the collective bargaining process. It is designed to delay bargaining for months, if not years. It is also a breach of faith with our members who - understandably - have been expecting a general improvement in their wages and conditions of employment in a new contract scheduled to go into effect on July 21st.

¹Postmaster General William F. Bolger to employees of USPS, April, 1981.

What the Postal Service has done also represents the height of duplicity. For six months, we have been meeting repeatedly with Mr. Bolger and his deputies in good faith to prepare for the upcoming negotiations. As recently as last week, we met with his top assistants. Why has he waited until now to express his reservations? Why didn't he make his objections known in January?

Now the Postmaster General decides to torpedo negotiations until the NLRB rules on the matter. His lack of good faith is undermining the entire collective bargaining process.

But in addition to striking at the financial security of all postal workers and, in addition, making a mockery of collective bargaining itself, the action of the Postal Service has severely damaged labor-management relations. At a time when our national political leaders are calling upon labor and management to work to improve economic productivity, it is deplorable that the Postal Service should take this action.

We are already in the process of informing our membership of the present situation, and we will communicate further with our members after the Postal Service's petition is formally filed with the NLRB. But no matter what the Postal Service does, we - the NALC and the APWU - will stick together.¹

On April 22, the negotiating teams for the APWU and the NALC arrived at the designated site for collective bargaining with the USPS. When it became clear that the Postal Service was not going to attend the session, Biller and Sombrotto issued a joint statement and held an impromptu press conference. The union leaders once again denounced the actions of the postmaster general and announced that they had filed a motion with the NLRB to dismiss the petition of the USPS. On April 30, the regional director of the NLRB dismissed the USPS petition.

¹APWU/NALC Joint Bargaining Committee Bulletin,
April 16, 1981.

Biller and Sombrotto immediately demanded that the Postal Service enter into negotiations for a new National Agreement. When the USPS refused to commence negotiations, the APWU and NALC filed an unfair labor practice charge with the NLRB. The USPS subsequently appealed the regional NLRB director's decision to the full board in Washington, D.C.

Unwilling to meet the postal unions at the bargaining table, the USPS continued negotiating through the media. The May-June issue of Postal Life featured an article on the demand for postal employment. In New York City, the article stated, 225,000 people had applied for 2,500 jobs expected to open up over the next three years. In Jackson, Mississippi, more than 1,000 people a day had signed up to take the entry level examination over a four-day period. In St. Louis, the figures were 8,000 applicants in one day for only fifty openings while in Baltimore, Maryland, 15,000 persons picked up applications in just two days with only twenty jobs expected to be available over the next eighteen months.¹ The message was clear. If postal workers didn't appreciate working for the USPS, there was a reserve army of labor available to replace them.

The unions, unable to confront the Postal Service

¹"Postal Jobs in High Demand," Postal Life, May-June 1981, pp. 3-4.

at the bargaining table, also moved their arguments to another arena. While the PMG was addressing a group of mass marketing representatives at the New York Hilton Hotel on the morning of June 11, seven hundred postal employees marched outside, carried signs and shouted their displeasure at Bolger's refusal to negotiate. Union leaders branded Bolger "a law breaker" and declared that any action the unions would take upon expiration of the current contract on July 21, 1981, would be his responsibility.

Meeting in an unprecedented joint session, the APWU national executive board and the NALC executive council developed plans for a nationwide demonstration. Designating June 25, as National Postal Action Day, the leadership of APWU and NALC appealed to every postal worker to participate in an informational picket line in front of every post office in the U.S.A.¹ Calling the Postmaster General's refusal to negotiate "an attempt to destroy the postal unions," Biller and Sombrotto assured the workers that the picketing scheduled for after work hours, was legal and could not lead to disciplinary action.

¹APWU/NALC Joint Bargaining Committee Bulletin,
June 11, 1981.

Postal legislation

While the postal unions prepared for the June 25 demonstration, activity on the legislative front gained momentum. Budget cuts proposed by the Reagan Administration threatened to eliminate 600 million dollars in Postal Service subsidies. Reagan, despite his campaign promises to the contrary, was moving toward reducing the cost-of-living adjustments for retired postal and federal workers. Proposals to alter the funding of federal employee health benefit plans were being debated in Congress. The proposed changes would undoubtedly result in higher premiums and reduced benefits for participants in the plans. A program to increase the five digit "zip-code" to nine digits was being pushed by the USPS but had been temporarily delayed, pending more data concerning the net benefit of such a program. During the month of May, this issue brought the postal union leaders before a congressional subcommittee. While the full impact of a nine-digit zip-code was unclear, it was undisputed that such a program would cause a drastic reduction in postal employment. At this same time, a lawsuit filed by the unions years before against the USPS was finally before the federal court and demanded the attention of postal union leaders. On February 12, 1979, a motion was filed by the NALC to intervene in the Fair Labor

Standards Act (FLSA) lawsuit against the USPS. The case involved violations of the FLSA by the USPS since May 1, 1974, when the Postal Service first came under the Act. While some postal workers had received compensation for the violations through a series of private lawsuits, the overwhelming majority had not. In the letter carrier craft it was estimated that 150,000 carriers were entitled to \$600-\$700 each. The Secretary of Labor also filed suit against the USPS on behalf of all postal workers, because some postal workers had received compensation (approximately 30,000 letter carriers), creating much dissension among employees. Carriers not included in the settlement blamed the union for mishandling the case.

Negotiations begin

On June 11, the National Labor Relations Board unanimously denied the appeal of the USPS on the earlier ruling by the NLRB's regional director finding no merit in the petition seeking determination of an appropriate bargaining unit. Whereupon, the USPS agreed to enter into negotiations. June 16 was designated as the date the first meetings would take place. Postal management and the union leaders all voiced confidence that a complete and acceptable contract could be agreed to by July 20. At the initial meeting, the parties set ground rules and exchanged proposals for everything but wage provisions.

The parties then agreed to resume negotiations on June 22.

The first week of bargaining moved slowly with the most significant events affecting postal employees occurring away from the negotiations. On June 22, the U.S. Postal Service board of governors unanimously rejected the Postal Rate Commission's (PRC) denial of a twenty-cent first-class stamp and requested a reconsideration by the PRC. NALC president, Sombrotto supported the postal rate increase and believed the additional revenues would soften the USPS position regarding wage provisions of the National Agreement.

On June 25, U.S. District Court Judge Aubrey Robinson ordered the USPS to begin the process of compensating employees for FLSA violations, the same day postal workers were demonstrating in front of post offices all across the country. Although National Postal Action Day was originally conceived by the postal unions as a means of getting the USPS to the bargaining table and negotiations were, in fact, underway, the unions decided to conduct the nationwide demonstrations as a show of support for the union negotiators. In addition to shifting the emphasis of the informational picketing, the unions renamed the day Postal Solidarity Day - USA. The demonstration was not as urgent because negotiations were taking place, but only a few locals refused to participate. The demonstrations, according to the general president of the APWU,

involved "the greatest number of postal workers ever."¹ There was a flurry of activity on Capitol Hill regarding postal employees at the end of June. Action in the House included approval of the Reagan Administration's fiscal year '82 budget which contained the elimination of one semi-annual cost-of-living adjustment for retired postal and federal workers, and a reduction of some 650 million dollars in the Postal Service's '82 budget. Other congressional action involved: implementation of the nine digit zip-code program, which the Senate voted to approve while implementation by the House was postponed until at least the end of fiscal year '83; guaranteed six-day mail delivery; retained the present relationship between the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and Medicare; sweeping changes in the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA); the House Subcommittee on Social Security approved a proposal to reduce the retirement benefits of federal and public workers eligible for social security and Civil Service annuities.²

On July 9, the APWU/NALC Joint Bargaining Committee submitted its wage proposals to the Postal Service. The

¹Moe Biller, "Breakthrough Thursday," The American Postal Worker, July, 1981, p. 6.

²NALC Bulletin, July 2, 1981.

pay package consisted of annual 5 percent wage increases for a three-year contract, an additional 2.7 percent first-year "catch-up" cost-of-living adjustment formula which would provide for increases in the hourly wage rate by one cent for each 0.25 point increase in the Consumer Price Index--instead of 0.4 point increase as provided in the 1978 contract. The unions' proposal also called for the immediate "roll-in" of the \$3,619 COLA, accumulated during the 1978 National Agreement, into the basic wage.¹ The wage demands which the union leaders considered realistic and not subject to a "whittling down" process of negotiations, were based on an extensive economic analysis of the Postal Service, conducted by an independent consulting firm. The wage package joined a host of other union proposals which were summarized by APWU:

1. No Lay-Off Protection: The unions are seeking to move up the date for "life-time protection" from September 15, 1978 to July 21, 1981
2. Increased prohibition against mandatory overtime, overtime premium pay to 200% and increased night differential
3. All Regular Program-Holidays: Two additional holidays, increased holiday pay has been proposed with

¹APWU/NALC Joint Bargaining Committee Bulletin, July 9, 1981.

voluntary scheduling

4. Safety and Health: Inclusion of mandatory OSHA coverage and the right to refuse unsafe work orders
5. Grievance Procedure: Primary goal is to eliminate the current backlog of grievances awaiting arbitrators. Also, a new system which will prevent such backlogs in the future and be more responsive to the needs of the membership¹

Negotiations stall

On July 10, APWU General President Biller accused Postmaster General Bolger of stonewalling the negotiations. Declaring that contract talks had stalled, Biller issued the following statement: "After 10 negotiating sessions between the USPS and the APWU/NALC Joint Bargaining Committee, there was no agreement on a single article for the new contract and virtually no signs that management was interested in reaching accord on even the most insignificant of the Union proposals."² On July 14, almost twenty-five hundred union representatives attended an

¹American Postal Workers Union News Service,
July 2, 1981.

²American Postal Workers Union News Service,
July 10, 1981.

emergency joint leadership conference in Washington, D.C. to be brought up to date on the status of negotiations by the NALC and APWU presidents. After being told that no progress had been made in the negotiations, the representatives were advised to be prepared to any and all possibilities. On July 15, Biller and Sombrotto addressed the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. and declared, "if the Postmaster General continues to treat the collective bargaining process as a sham, he will provoke a nationwide strike."¹

On Friday, July 17, postal employees received their pay checks and a note from the Postmaster General advising them that any postal worker participating in an illegal job action would be fired. Late that evening, the Postal Service put its first wage offer on the bargaining table. The proposal which called for no salary increases for three years, a limited cost-of-living adjustment, and exclusion of the past three years COLA from the base salary rate, was the only wage offer the Postal Service would make until a few hours before the existing contract was to expire. Despite the involvement of a federal mediator, the bargaining process was at a virtual standstill from July 17-20. In fact, on the day the contract was due to expire, the parties had recessed from late

¹APWU/NALC Joint Bargaining Committee Bulletin,
July 15, 1981.

morning until almost 5:30 P.M. The second salary offer made by the USPS came at approximately 8:00 P.M. on the night of July 20. The proposal was similar to the initial offer of the Postal Service except that it included three annual one hundred dollar increases which were tied to productivity increases. The union leaders immediately rejected this offer.

In Washington, D.C. more than one hundred top officers of APWU and NALC were assembled in a room at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel. These union representatives were the first-line in the nationwide system of communications developed to transmit news of a settlement or instructions to strike to the general membership. Included in this group was the APWU Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee which, according to the constitution and by-laws of the national union, had "full veto power over the proposed National Agreement."¹

All across the country postal employees were eagerly awaiting instructions from the national union leaders. In union halls, hotels, store fronts and private homes, clerks and carriers were maintaining a "strike vigil." The overwhelming hope of these concerned and involved

¹ "Article XIX," Constitution and By-Laws of the American Postal Workers Union, (as amended, Aug. 1980).

unionists was that a settlement would be reached and a strike avoided. Just as strong, however, was the feeling that if postal management continued to be unreasonable in its behavior at the bargaining table, a nationwide strike would ensue. This strike would not be a "wildcat" or a demonstration by an isolated group as the previous postal walkouts had been, but rather a full scale nationwide atriike, called for and sanctioned by the national union leadership. For the first time in history, the full strength of the postal workers would be demonstrated in s strike that would bring postal service in America to an immediate and complete half.

The clock is stopped

At 11:59 P.M. the parties agreed to "stop the clock." This tactic, not uncommon in negotiations, is designed to allow bargaining to continue past the technical expiration of the contract, which by agreement, remains in force. "Stopping the clock" is also a way for union leaders to avoid following the no contract-no work mandates of their memberships. After three one-hour extensions of the existing contract, at approximately 3:30 A.M., Biller and Sombrotto entered the room where the union officers were gathered, and announced that a tentative agreement had been reached. The agreement, as presented by the two national presidents, included a \$750 salary increase for the first year of the contract,

followed by \$600 pay raises in each of the two succeeding years of the three year pact. The two leaders also stated that the COLA formula as contained in the previous contract would continue and that there would be no "cap" on the amount of money postal workers could receive under the COLA provision. It took the NALC officers less than five minutes to unanimously voice their enthusiastic approval of the tentative agreement. The APWU officers, however, were not as quick to affirm the agreement. Biller was asked about health and safety and work rule provisions, and about the grievance and discipline procedures, as well as the amnesty issue concerning the fired workers. Members of the Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee balked at voting on something they had not seen in writing. All they had to review were notes Biller had taken at the negotiations. The chairman of the APWU Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee describes the scene at the L'Enfant Plaza:

The NALC had already voted to accept the tentative agreement and wanted to return to the bargaining table and sign off. The APWU on the other hand, was mired in a constitutional battle because the Rank & File Committee would not vote. The mood in the room was getting hostile between the two groups and then our own mandates came back to haunt us. If the principles (sic) did not return to the bargaining table to sign off, a strike had to be called. ...It became clear to me that the committee had to vote now whether it wanted to or not. Further delay would have caused a strike situation. ...The vote was 9-2 to send out the tentative agreement. Once that vote was announced, order was restored to the group and the principles (sic)

returned to the bargaining table. Word was then released to the field that a tentative agreement was reached and the details of the economic package were announced.

...We remained sequestered and were expecting Moe Biller and Vince Sombrotto to return momentarily. Many of us had been up 30 hours or more at that point and it was now about 4:15 A.M.

...Finally Moe Biller and Vince Sombrotto returned. They each gathered their groups and announced that the economic agreement earlier announced was in dispute. We realized then that the earlier settlement was a verbal one and nothing had been signed off on. The Postal Service claimed it had never offered wage increases and that the \$750, \$600 and \$600 were all bonuses. The NALC voted to allow Sombrotto to use his judgment and to accept what he thought was best. The APWU held a different view and favored returning to the table.¹

News of the accord had been broadcast nationwide at the time letter carriers in the eastern part of the country were preparing to leave for work, and also served to release those postal workers who were maintaining "strike vigils" across the country. Therefore, it was with the threat of a strike defused that Biller and Sombrotto returned to the bargaining table to finalize the terms of the agreement. Postmaster General Bolger now entered the talks. Arriving a little after 5:00 A.M., the fresh and feisty PMG faced the two frantic and fatigued union presidents. After an almost non-stop negotiating session that ran well into the afternoon of July 21, the parties agreed on the terms for a tentative three-year contract. Highlights of the pact included: Three annual basic wage

¹Steve Albanese, "Editorial: July 20, 1981 Relived," Bostonian, October, 1981, p. 8.

increases of \$300 each; three annual bonus cash payments of \$350 each; retention of the existing modified no-layoff clause; continuation of the "uncapped" COLA provision at the same one cent per hour increase for each 0.4 rise in the Consumer Price Index with the base index for calculating moved as in the previous agreement to the month preceding expiration of the contract, i.e., from June 1978 to June 1981; delay of three years for "rolling in" the \$3,619 COLA increases to the base wage rate from the 1978-81 contract, until October 1984; a \$150 contract ratification bonus, provided the tentative agreement was ratified within forty-five days.

Opposition to the
agreement

Billers and Sombrotto launched an immediate and intensive campaign to have the contract accepted by their memberships. The APWU Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee voted to send the contract to the membership for ratification by a twelve-two vote. Among the NALC leadership there was virtual unanimity that the agreement be approved as national officers went into the field urging acceptance of the contract. The pact, however, was not so well received by the APWU hierarchy. Three full time national officers announced their opposition to the proposed agreement and appealed to the postal workers to reject the tentative contract. Opposition to the proposed

pact was not limited to the APWU. The Mailhandlers Union, LIUNA, offered the same contract by postal management, rejected the proposal and chose instead to go to fact-finding and arbitration as provided in the Postal Reorganization Act. In a mailgram sent to its local officers LIUNA listed among its reasons for rejecting the tentative agreement: inadequate pay increases; failure to roll in the previous COLA increases; and lack of any substantial improvement in the area of health and safety. The \$150 ratification bonus was referred to by LIUNA as "blackmail."

Opposition to the tentative agreement was spreading rapidly among the postal clerks. The Connecticut State Postal Workers urged rejection as did the Pittsburgh Metro Area Local, the Boston Local and the three large locals covering Queens and Long Island. The president of the N.Y. State APWU appealed to members to turn down the agreement. The president of the Long Island, N.Y. Area Local formed a group, Workers Against Ratification, and used the acronym WAR on letters sent around the country urging rejection of the contract. A coalition of APWU locals from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Virginia, representing approximately one-third of the total APWU membership was also opposed to ratifying the agreement.

Another group, Members United For A Better Contract, headed by the three APWU national officers who were actively opposing the agreement, was distributing literature all across the country encouraging rejection of the contract. This group had coalesced opponents of the agreement which, by August 3, included the presidents of APWU locals in Chicago, Miami, Cincinnati, California. The most vehement objections to the proposed agreement were directed at: the pay raise, which according to the critics, amounted to only 1.5 percent each year, less than the almost 3 percent obtained by the deposed union leaders in the previous contract; the failure to roll in the \$3,619 COLA from the 1978-81 contract and the subsequent adverse effects that could have on the solvency of the retirement fund; the inclusion of bonuses as opposed to base pay increments; and the failure to achieve any significant gains in the area of health and safety. Additional criticism concerned the lack of progress in reinstating the fired workers, the failure to negotiate important work rules, no improvement in the grievance procedure, and inability to obtain an all regular work force.

While opposition to the contract was minimal among the letter carriers, the clerks' disaffection continued to grow. Hoping to stem the tide of dissent, the APWU

leadership projected the potential of larger and larger pay increases over the life of the contract. In a bulletin sent out on July 22, the proposed pay package was estimated at bringing the average postal worker pay to more than \$25,000 before the end of the contract.¹ By July 28, the figure projected was \$27,000.² Sensing that the contract might be rejected, the APWU president applied pressure on the membership. Hoping to deter voting against the agreement, he mailed along with the ratification ballot, a notice which stated that a vote in rejection of the proposed agreement would necessitate a strike. The NALC was also advising that rejection of the contract would precipitate an illegal strike, when an event unfolded outside the postal community which greatly affected the voting behavior of postal workers.

Postal workers and the
PATCO strike

On August 3, 1981, approximately 80 percent of the fourteen thousand member Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) went on strike. These government employees, subject to the same strike restrictions as the postal workers, were instructed by the Presi-

¹APWU News Service July 22, 1981.

²APWU News Service July 28, 1981.

dent of the United States to return to duty on their regular shift on August 5, or forfeit their jobs. Only a small percentage of the striking controllers heeded the President's warning and returned to work. Moving swiftly and mercilessly, the Reagan Administration summarily fired every controller who remained away from his job. The government's position was inflexible. Not only would no negotiations be held with the union, but neither would controllers wishing to return to work after August 5 be allowed employment. Selective arrests were made of a number of local PATCO leaders and a widely publicized photo of a striking controller being led away in chains received much attention. America's postal employees were reminded of the more than one hundred fired workers from the 1978 strike who were still out of work. A year had also passed since the firing of the APWU shop stewards over the heat protest and work stoppage in Chicago. Still unemployed, these union representatives were awaiting final determination of their appeals by an arbitrator. The union leadership's inability to achieve any form of amnesty during the negotiations weighed heavily on the minds of postal workers. This failure on the part of the national presidents was particularly upsetting in the ranks of the APWU because Moe Biller had been one of the most outspoken advocates of amnesty, and a majority of the fired workers had been members of his former local. Results of

the ratification vote were announced during the last week of August. APWU members accepted the proposed agreement by a vote of 147,692 to 36,595.¹ Among letter carriers, the vote was 124,316 in favor of the contract and 20,856 opposed.²

Binding arbitration

The Mail Handlers Union, LIUNA, sought binding arbitration instead of accepting what it termed a "totally inadequate" contract agreed to by the other postal unions, and was able to improve upon the contract agreed to by the NALC and APWU. Most significant was an increase in the base wage rate reflected in retirement, overtime, and premium pay benefits such as night differential and holiday work. Slight gains were also realized in the area of health and safety, an issue which received increased attention when a postal employee at the bulk mail facility in Detroit was killed by a falling crossbeam shortly after the APWU and NALC contracts were ratified. Consequently, the Mail Handlers Union will enter the 1984 negotiations in a stronger position than the NALC and APWU concerning the issue of base pay. The most significant achievement

¹APWU News Service, August 27, 1981.

²"Contract Ratified!" The Postal Record, September 1981, p. 1.

of the Mail Handlers' arbitration venture could very well mean its own preservation. Further raiding of the LIUNA membership by APWU must now be reconsidered.

Summary

The 1970 Postal Reorganization Act, enacted in an atmosphere of conflict and controversy has to a great degree served to minimize the amount and intensity of conflict in the postal environment. The bargaining process contained in the Act has resulted in five nationally negotiated agreements. Postal workers have achieved a full-scale set of labor/management relations, absent the right to strike, with contracts comparable to the better industrial union agreements. While there have been some scattered and localized walkouts and job actions, the Postal Service has not experienced any significant or large scale disruption by its employees since 1970.

The decade has seen postal workers dramatically increase their salaries while postal management has increased its control of the work environment. Job functions for a large number of postal workers have become increasingly machine-paced. Letter carriers are subject to a greater amount of supervision while on their routes and some of the traditional functions of their craft, such as preparing mail for delivery and forwarding undeliverable mail, are being performed by clerks and/or machines.

The greatest and most immediate impact of the new technology affects the clerk craft. The introduction of mail sorting machinery has contributed to the emergence of health and safety considerations as major issues facing postal workers and their unions.

Local postal union leaders have criticized the failure of their national representatives to address the issue of work rules in each of the five negotiated agreements, and to obtain improvement in this area, and as a result local leaders have become disillusioned with the collective bargaining process. Delay in the grievance-arbitration procedure coupled with the fact that postal management may impose a penalty prior to a hearing has disappointed local leaders. "Guilty until proven innocent" and "justice delayed is justice denied," continue to be common complaints.

National negotiators to paint themselves into a corner with strike threats they have no intention of carrying out and then offer the membership a choice between a poor contract and an illegal strike have discouraged many. The fact that binding arbitration in 1978, and 1981, resulted in improvements in the contracts national negotiators had agreed to, may cause this aspect of the process to be more acceptable in future negotiations.

A decade of collective bargaining has not reduced the postal unions' dependence upon and involvement in the legislative process. Despite statements by postal union leaders which refer to lobbying as "collective begging," the legislative activities of the unions are, in fact, expanding. Faced with a hostile and anti-union Administration in Washington, as well as an increasingly tough and sophisticated postal management at the bargaining table, the postal unions are investing increasing amounts of energy and funds in the legislative arena. Postal management has not only become more hard-nosed at the bargaining table, they have met each instance of collective action by the postal workers with increasing force and penalties. One does not know what postal management's reaction would be if faced with a large scale and well organized job action because the unions have chosen not to try such an encounter. It does seem, however, that at the present time postal management has the upper hand and direct large scale collective action by postal workers is unlikely.

One area of conflict which has not abated during the decade of collective bargaining is among the postal unions. Inter as well as intra union clashes have reached an unprecedented peak. Beginning with the letter carriers' ousting of the incumbent Branch 36 leadership in 1970, and progressing through the decade to the election

of the two "militant" leaders from N.Y.C. as national presidents of the NALC and APWU, one can see a classic evolution of individuals, organizations, movements and goals. As informal and local leaders these individuals mobilized around the principles of union democracy at a time when there was strong sentiment against the incumbent national union leadership. The membership viewed these principles as a means to redress grievances and accomplish the goals of improved wages and benefits. Once the democratic processes were in place, the rank and file first rejected what they perceived as a poor contract, then shortly thereafter ousted the national union leadership.

As national leaders, the former insurgents displaced the original goals of the Rank and File Movement and began to move toward accommodation with the larger society. As incumbents they assumed the posture of articulating leadership more concerned with organizational maintenance than obtaining benefits at the bargaining table. The apathy of the union membership which took hold once the apparent goals of democratizing the union and ousting the incumbent leadership occurred, contributed to an environment that led to the subsequent oligarchization of the unions at the national level.

If one applies the process of rationalization, as defined by Max Weber, and the iron law of oligarchy, as

postulated by Roberto Michels, to this situation, it becomes apparent that once these union leaders moved away from the original goals of the Rank and File Movement and toward accommodation with the dominant social consensus, an increase in conservative and oligarchical tendencies was inevitable. An additional explanation of the dynamics that engulfed these union leaders is found in Seymour Martin Lipset's study, Agrarian Socialism. Analyzing the problems social movements encounter upon assuming the operating responsibilities of an organization, Lipset writes:

The organization in power is limited by its coalition dependencies-its links to other organizations; it is limited by the range of variables outside of its control, such as the general state of the world economy; it is limited by lack of experience and competence, by its dependency on the holdover office holders; and whereas incentives were earlier of a purposive and idealistic sort, now material incentives become the rules of the day...¹

In adapting to a changing environment, the postal unions have been affected by external variables over which they have had no direct control. These include: the state of the economy, the large reserve army of labor, the Reagan Administration, the PATCO strike.

¹Seymour Martin Lipset et al, Agrarian Socialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950) quoted in Robert R. Evans, ed., Social Movements: a reader and source book, (Chicago: Rand McNally College Pub. Co., 1973), p. 101.

The decade of collective bargaining has also seen the focus of active and militant trade unionism shift from the letter carriers to the postal clerks and mailhandlers. Letter carriers were not involved in the 1974, 1978, and 1980 job actions. The new technology, the consolidation of smaller post offices into bulk mail facilities and sectional centers, and the increasing activism of postal women have contributed to this phenomenon. Although no viable rank and file movement has emerged within the APWU, a number of independent candidates have been elected to national union office. The present general president does not have complete control of the national executive board and it is likely that the 1983 elections will have national officers on opposing slates. In the NALC, the current president's control of the union is virtually unchallenged. The merger of the five postal unions into one industrial union in 1971, has not led to further amalgamations. In fact, the animosities between the NALC and the Rural Letter Carriers and the APWU and LIUNA have increased. The aborted attempts of the NALC and APWU to "raid" the memberships of the other unions has intensified the divisiveness among the postal unions. While the APWU and NALC appear to have established a close working relationship, the prospect of them merging is another issue. This question of one large union for postal workers will be among the issues addressed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE WORKPLACE

Throughout history postal service in America has responded to the social, political, technological and demographic variables of the society. Beginning with the early colonial posts and moving through the westward expansion, industrialization, urbanization and the recent shift of industry and population to the "sun belt," the postal service has contributed to and served the nation's social and structural forms. The postal service did not adjust to changing conditions in American society, and the system faltered. In 1966, the Post Office Department was processing mail in basically the same way it had since its founding almost two hundred years earlier. The method of sorting, separating, and preparing mail for delivery was done almost entirely by hand. Only the system for transporting mail had significantly improved. The increase in mail volume brought about by a growing population and a greater mobility and specialization of the financial, political and corporate world contributed to the breakdown of the antiquated postal system in Chicago during the fall of 1966.

The Chicago crisis spurred the movement toward reform of the postal system. While the question of reform centered primarily on the structure of postal service and seemed to be a conflict between the managers and craft employees of the old Post Office Department, the greater struggle occurred between the new corporate-type managers and all other postal workers. This all-engrossing but less obvious conflict concerned the fundamental concept of the postal system, i.e., the ideology which fostered the principle of service rather than profit. This "service first" ideology permeated the entire organization and was a major motivating factor for both management and bargaining unit employees.

The Great Postal Strike of 1970 and the continuing militancy of the postal workers during the debates on postal reform contributed significantly to the new structure of the USPS, particularly in the area of labor/management relations. This militancy also led to unprecedented improvement in the salaries of postal employees. The postal workers, preoccupied with increasing their wages and struggling simultaneously within their union over issues of representation and union democracy, were unable to mount an effective resistance to the attack on the service-centered value system which dominated the postal environment.

Shifts in power and authority

The new postal managers first moved to restructure the lines of authority and decision-making. The number of regional offices was reduced from fifteen to five then further subdivided into metro areas and districts. Research and planning were given high priority. Middle-management positions, primarily those at the regional level, were filled by people brought in from industry and by college graduates, most of whom had degrees in business administration. Much of the decision-making power of local postmasters and managers, especially in the areas of personnel and employee and labor relations, was usurped. The regional offices, staffed extensively by the new managers, became centers of power and authority in matters previously under the purview of local offices. This new structure and recruiting process greatly reduced the influence of local political clubs and ethnic associations within the postal community. A further erosion of this local and ethnic influence occurred when the USPS changed the existing policy and allowed supervisors to compete for promotions outside their own post offices. Even the political appointment of rural letter carriers and postmasters was transferred to review committees made up of postal managers and business leaders. In effect, the politics of postal patronage was not ended but was shifted to the executive sphere. The higher levels of postal management were still in Washington, D.C. and were all political appointees, most

from private industry.

Purging of old managers

The USPS embarked upon a systematic purge of its old-line managers, replacing as many of them as possible with individuals not committed to the "service first" ideology of the Post Office Department. The USPS offered a one-time bonus of up to a half year's salary to career employees at regional and headquarters level as an inducement to retire immediately. Unresponsive or ineligible managers were considered "non-productive" by the USPS and were "red-circled," i.e., permanently frozen at a particular wage level, classified "non-promotable," and stripped of most influence and authority. Within a relatively short period of time, thousands of old-line managers left the postal service. Those that remained either adjusted their behavior to fit in with the new corporate-type image and profit motive ideology or were relegated to positions in which they were merely "putting in their time."

Effect on the unions

The unions and most of the people they represented still clung tenaciously to the "service first" ideology. Negotiations between the union officials and the new managers were strained. Grievances and Memorandums of Agreement were almost impossible to resolve. An amicable consensus was especially difficult to reach when issues related to operations were involved because the parties were approach-

ing the situation from diametrically opposed ideological perspectives. Particularly frustrating to the unions was the inability to arrive at an agreement with the old-line managers over issues which previously had been resolvable. Often these managers would agree informally with the unions' suggestions for providing better service to the public, but were no longer officially able to put the proposals into effect.

Reductions in service

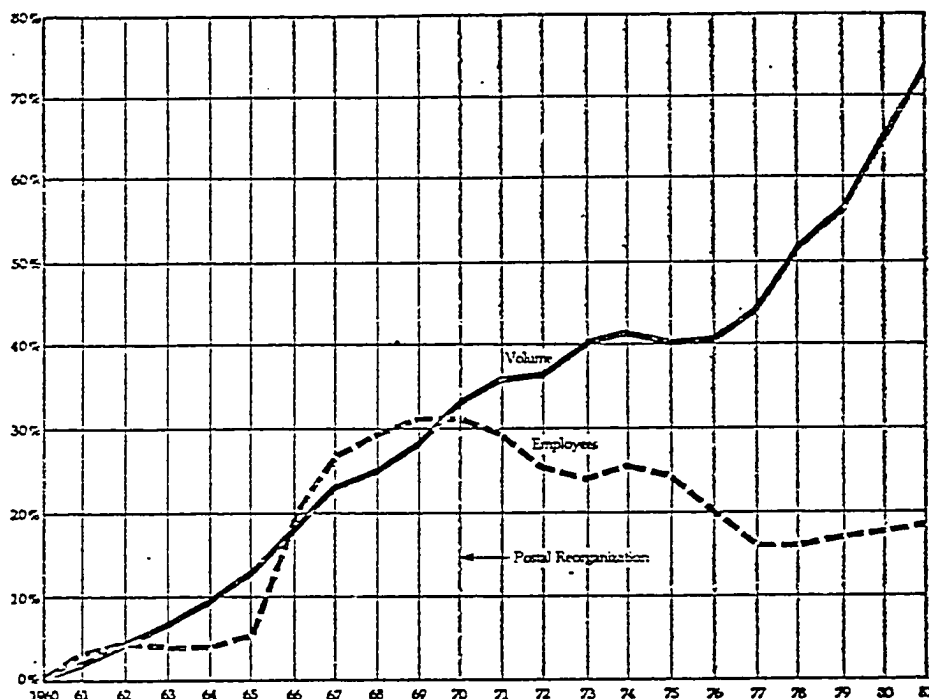
Among the service curtailments implemented by USPS were:

1. Reduction of deliveries. In many cities there is no longer a business area delivery on Saturday. Business day deliveries have been reduced to one or a maximum of two. Parcel post is no longer delivered on weekends, and the second attempt to effect a delivery has been eliminated
2. Curtailment of forwarding time. The length of time mail is forwarded after a patron moves has been cut from two years to one
3. Less window service. Many small post offices were closed; others no longer provide service on weekends. These closings were accompanied by a reduction in the number of hours window service was available during the week
4. Reduction in collections. The number of collection

boxes and the frequency of pick-ups were greatly reduced. In many areas mail was no longer collected on Sundays

The curtailment of service was accompanied by a reduction in the number of postal employees and an increase in the volume of mail. The postal unions warned that the system was moving toward collapse.

Figure 3. Volume and Work Force Trends, 1960-1981
(percentage change since 1960)



SOURCE: Annual Report of the Postmaster General, 1981, p. 3.

NOTE: Increase in 1981 employee total was due to a rise in rural carrier substitutes of 2,326. It should be noted, however, that these substitutes work on an occasional basis and are not full-time Postal Service employees.

New technology

The system, however, did not break down as it had in 1966, because postal management had in addition to reducing services, increased the mechanization of the mails and introduced a series of new mail processing procedures.

These have included:

1. The bulk mail system, wherein twenty-one automated centers and ten associate services facilities designed to process parcel post and other bulk mail were put in operation
2. The computerized forwarding system, whereby information related to change of address is retrieved by computer. The forwarding of mail, traditionally a letter carrier function, was transferred to the clerks providing additional jobs for the clerk craft (which was most dramatically affected by the increased automation) while allowing letter carriers more time to deliver the increasing volume of mail
3. Mailgram, which is a combination letter-telegram sent by wire and delivered by letter carrier. In its first year of operation, 1970, less than 100,000 Mailgrams were delivered. For 1980, the figure was close to 40 million
4. Presorted Mail, wherein a discount in the sale of postage is given to mailers who separate and bundle their mail by destination prior to depositing it with the USPS. By 1979, 65 percent of the mail in mecha-

nized offices was being sorted by machine. Prior to reorganization, the ratio was only 25 percent.

According to the USPS' own figures, gross productivity increased by 23.4 percent between 1971 and 1979¹

Pressure on the workers and
the struggle for support

The reductions in service brought increasing pressure upon the postal workers, particularly the letter carriers, who interact with the public on a regular basis and receive much of the criticism regarding the deteriorating service. Unable to convince the new managers that service should take priority over profit, the postal unions appealed to management on the basis of the "poor image" the new quasi-corporation was creating. When the postal managers failed to respond to this approach, the unions went directly to Congress and the public. Postal management also vied for public support. An Office of Advertising was created, and for the first time in history a paid advertising campaign was launched by the postal service. Top postal officials throughout the country spoke to business and civic groups and appeared on radio and TV talk shows. Articles and interviews involving postal management were published in national magazines. When the postal unions petitioned Congress about the cutbacks in jobs and service, Postmaster General Blount responded by issuing his infamous "gag rule"

¹USPS Publication 100, May 1980, pg. 13

which dictated that all communication between postal employees and Congress would have to go through his office. This tactic failed to deter direct contact between the postal workers and their elected representatives but did increase the ire of Congress and the unions toward the new postal managers. Dozens of bills designed to amend the Postal Reorganization Act and to return the postal system to congressional control appeared on Capitol Hill during the first two years of the USPS' existence.

Employee opposition reduced by
pay increases and promotions

Unable to appease the postal workers and the unions, the USPS moved to defuse the opposition to the new corporation. Toward this end the USPS: Initiated a Postal Employee Development Center which provided training for craft employees who wanted to improve the skills needed for development and advancement; made almost all level-five craft employees (clerks and carriers) eligible for supervisory positions and, in fact, did appoint many from their ranks; and decided to significantly increase the wages of postal employees. While the unions rightfully expected credit for the salary increases gained through their efforts at the collective bargaining table, the fact is, postal management, in 1971, and for the four succeeding contracts was willing (in varying and somewhat declining degrees) to surrender wage improvements while increasing its

authority over the work environment. As the external and internal threats to the legitimacy of the corporation have diminished, so too has the willingness on the part of the USPS to agree to substantial pay increases for postal employees.

External threat:
private carriers

While labor/management relationships in the USPS have been primarily adversarial, the postal managers and the unions have joined together when the system has been threatened by outside forces. The most formidable foe of this ad hoc alliance has been competition from privately-owned distribution companies. The USPS has been slow to react to attacks on the private express statutes which granted a monopoly to the Post Office Department for the delivery of almost all mail, particularly first-class letters. When the Independent Postal System of America announced in December 1971, that it would deliver Christmas cards in certain communities at a lower rate than the USPS, it was the NALC that went to court and prevented this encroachment. In subsequent actions, the most recent involving the electronic transfer of mail, postal management and the unions have successfully combined forces to insure that the USPS will be very much involved in the electronic mail era. Opposition to the USPS' entry into telecommunications came from members of the Reagan Administration, Congress, and the Postal Rate Commission. The Justice Department has

filed proceedings against the USPS in Federal District Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals. Although the system has gone into effect in the USPS, a legal challenge to its legitimacy still exists. The system, consisting of computer-generated messages which are transmitted to post offices where they are printed, put in envelopes, then delivered by letter carriers, is viewed by postal management and the unions as essential for the survival of the USPS. This perspective emanates from the fact that only about one-fifth of all current communications involves postal service. Further, almost three-quarters of all first-class mail consists of financially related transactions and electronic transfer of funds.

United Parcel Service:
a potent competitor

One area in which the USPS has not maintained a competitive posture is that of parcel post. Since 1971, a privately-owned company, United Parcel Service, has handled a larger volume of parcels than the USPS. By 1975, United Parcel Service was delivering twice as many parcels as the USPS and by 1980 more than four times as many. Opponents of the postal monopoly on first-class mail often point to the success of the United Parcel Service as an example of how a privately-owned company can out-perform a quasi-governmental agency. The argument, however, is not as simple as that. It includes the basic ideological

question of whether the postal system should be run as a service and, therefore, partially subsidized operation or as a profit-oriented, self-supporting entity. The United States Postal Service has an obligation to process and deliver all mail, including that which is unprofitable. If the statutes were relaxed, an independent firm, by selectively choosing to handle only that mail which was profitable (high volume areas which would be primarily large business districts), could effectively underprice the USPS. The mail that remained to be delivered would be the least profitable (sparsely populated residential areas) and, therefore, would create an even greater deficit in the USPS budget. This is, to a large degree, what has occurred with parcel post.

Postal rates

Postal management cites the rising cost of labor as the basis for the need to increase rates. The postal unions disclaim the charge, but are reluctant to offer much opposition because they have been persuaded that higher rates, especially as contract negotiations approach, will make life at the bargaining table easier for them. Postage rates are probably at the point of diminishing return. The cost for an electronic transmittal is only a few pennies higher than that of a stamped first-class letter. Public opinion could easily turn against the USPS and toward private carriers if postal rates continue to rise while

service deteriorates.

TABLE 1
FIRST-CLASS MAIL RATES

1. Letters

Effective Date	Per Oz. (Cents)	First Oz. (Cents)	Each Add'l. Oz. (Cents)
July 1, 1885	2		
Nov. 3, 1917	3		
July 1, 1919	2		
July 6, 1932	3		
Aug. 1, 1958	4		
Jan. 7, 1963	5		
Jan. 7, 1968	6		
May 16, 1971	8		
March 2, 1974	10		
Sept. 14, 1975		10	 9
Dec. 31, 1975		13	11
July 6, 1976		13	11
May 29, 1978		15	13
March 22, 1981		18	17
Nov. 1, 1981		20	17

SOURCE: History of the U.S. Postal Service 1775-1981,
United States Postal Service Publication 100, March 1982,
p. 7.

Collective bargaining prior
to postal reform

The Great Postal Strike of 1970 greatly affected the structure of collective bargaining in the postal service. Prior to that strike (and the subsequent reorganization of the old Post Office Department) bargaining between postal management and the unions was severely restricted. While Executive Order 10988 brought collective bargaining to federal workers it allowed only a limited number of issues to be negotiated. Major items, basic to collective bargaining in private industry, were deemed non-negotiable.

These included wages, fringe benefits and many working conditions. Civil service regulations and agency rules and procedures as contained in various manuals were considered inviolate. Mediation and arbitration were advisory and findings were made available to management only, even though the unions bore half the cost. Final decisions on impasses, grievances and discipline cases were made by management or by what the unions perceived as a management agency in the case of the Civil Service Commission. The fact that management's position was upheld in 90 percent of the cases which went before the Commission, reinforced the unions' perception. The overwhelming majority of cases, particularly those involving discipline, were settled informally at the local level. Political clubs and ethnic associations played a major role in the informal resolution process as they did in the promotional opportunities of postal workers. The four national and related local agreements which were negotiated under the Executive Order between 1962 and 1968, served to introduce postal management and the unions to the dynamics of collective bargaining, although on a limited level. The agreements provided each a familiarity with the other's personnel and approaches to negotiations. For the postal unions, the bargaining experiences under Executive Order 10988 exposed the weaknesses of the system and, therefore, helped to formulate their demand for changes during the struggle over

postal reform.

Collective bargaining under
the Postal Reorganization Act

Collective bargaining in the USPS has apparently been quite successful. There have been five negotiated agreements since reorganization and no recurrence of the large-scale strike activity that preceded the restructuring. The process has been accepted by labor and management, and neither side is desirous of returning to the old system of congressional control. The unions, however, are still very much in favor of Congress maintaining certain authority over the postal service, particularly in areas related to funding and service standards. While postal management and the unions still publicly claim that service is their manifest function, service has suffered during the decade of collective bargaining. The bargaining process, however, is only indirectly related to the reduction in service. It is the latent function of labor and management that have contributed greatly to the demise of service in the postal system. Reorganization imposed an obligation on management to reduce the postal deficit and ultimately operate on a "break even" or profit basis eliminating the need for continuing the large postal subsidy. For the postal managers working within this new budgetary framework, cost control has replaced service as their primary concern. On their side, the unions have replaced service with "survival" in the form of maintenance of membership, as their top

priority. As postal management moved to save money and the postal unions struggled to save jobs, the adversarial nature of labor/management relations in the postal service expanded. With the common and cooperative bond of the "service first" ideology destroyed, a distrustful and competitive labor/management atmosphere permeated the postal system. Management viewed the postal workers as "slackers" and obstacles to achieving the omnipresent budgetary goals. For postal employees, management became the "enemy" out to "get" the workers by increasing workloads, discipline and supervision while reducing the number of employees in the workforce.

Grievance appeals backlog

The tension in the labor/management relationship has been reflected by the tremendous number and backlog of unresolved grievances. The enormity and seriousness of this problem was documented in a special report issued by the Comptroller General in 1979. Citing the poor labor relations climate as likely to "impair the ability of service managers to move the mail as efficiently and effectively as possible,"¹ the report cited statistics as evidenced in Table 2.

¹"Improved Grievance-Arbitration System: A Key to Better Labor Relations in the Postal Service," Report to the Congress by the Comptroller General of the U.S., Pubn. GGD-80-12, November 28, 1979, p. 8.

TABLE 2

GRIEVANCE APPEAL VOLUMES 1975 NATIONAL AGREEMENT
CUMULATIVE THROUGH JULY 30, 1978

<u>Processing Steps</u>	<u>Volume</u>
Arbitration	20,474
Step 4	28,904
Step 3	100,765
Step 2b	41,871
Step 2a (note a)	253,350
Step 1 (note a)	340,067
TOTAL	785,431

a/ GAO estimates; Postal Service does not accumulate these statistics.

SOURCE: Ibid.

Referring to the large number of backlogged appeals, many going back as long as three to five years, the report states: "The backlog has been a part of the system since the 1971 contract but has become progressively worse."¹

Management methods

While the militancy of postal workers has apparently abated, the aggressive policies of postal management toward the workers have not. Increased supervision, surveillance, discipline, and methods for speeding up and adding to

¹ Ibid.

employees' job functions are common management practices. This systematic attack on the ability of postal employees to influence their work environment began shortly after the 1970 strike. Techniques and strategies include:

1. Reduction of the workforce in almost all craft categories while increasing the ratio of supervisors to workers and more than doubling the number of employees assigned to the Postal Inspection Service
2. Moving major mail facilities from the inner cities to the suburbs, thereby changing the composition of the workforce and destroying many of the existing social and political networks
3. Introducing new technology, particularly the automated sorting machines which isolate and debilitate the clerks who operate them
4. Hiring large numbers of casual employees. These temporary workers have no rights under the contract, seldom join the union and work at an hourly rate much lower than career employees
5. Introduction of a variety of time and motion studies resulting in stringent work measurement systems

Labor/management cooperation

Attempts have been made by the postal union leaders and managers of USPS to discuss ways to improve labor/management relations while increasing the job satisfaction of postal employees. A change in the direction of the

informational bulletin of the NALC was reflected by praise of this new labor/management cooperation. However, the bulletin also contained announcements of two decisions by postal arbitrators--the first prevented management from increasing the amount of weight for individual pieces of mail a letter carrier could be required to carry, from two to eight pounds, and the second allowed postal management to ignore seniority when filling day-to-day assignments in the carrier craft.¹ On June 17, 1982, management of the USPS notified the unions of its intention to reclassify two level five clerk craft positions to lower levels of pay.

The enthusiasm of the national union leadership, based on the promises rather than the practices of postal management, is in contradiction to the skepticism of the general membership's viewpoint developed from daily on the job experiences. The fact is, management in the USPS, despite statements to the contrary, is predominantly undemocratic, authoritarian and task, as opposed to employee-oriented. Management methods in the USPS can best be described as based on the principles of scientific management rather than human relations. Nowhere in the American postal system is there substantial evidence of significant movement toward modern participative management methods.

¹NALC Bulletin, No. 9, March 26, 1982.

Postal Inspection
Service (PIS)

One of management's methods for increasing it's control of the work environment has been through the use of the Postal Inspection Service. The PIS has almost tripled it's ranks since the reorganization of the old Post Office Department. At least as striking as the absolute numerical increase of the PIS (1,861 in 1969 to 5,242 in 1980) is the increasing influence of postal inspectors in all aspects of the postal service.

C. Neil Benson, Deputy Postmaster General is a former postal inspector. Benson, until his appointment as Deputy Postmaster General, was Chief Postal Inspector. By virtue of his office, he is also a voting member on the Board of Governors of the USPS. Chief Postal Inspector Kenneth H. Fletcher is also a member of the Executive Committee, the major policy-making body of postal management. The Chief Postal Inspector often has a background with other enforcement agencies. William F. Cotter, who held the position from 1969-1975, served in both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency. A number of other key positions in postal management are presently held by former members of the PIS, including that of Postmaster in Manhattan and District Manager of the Western Region.

In a recent testimony before a congressional subcommittee, the president of the APWU offered the following

comments on the role of the Postal Inspection Service:

...Use of inspectors in routine labor relations matters cannot be justified.

Nevertheless, postal inspectors are regularly used in matters that are pure and simple labor relations matters. Last summer, for example, postal inspectors were used to film postal employees engaging in peaceful, lawful informational picketing. Such surveillance of lawful picketing has been held by the National Labor Relations Board to be unlawful coercion and interference with employee rights in other cases when it is done by company labor relations personnel. When it is done by armed law enforcement officers, the effect can only be more intimidating. This occurred in Illinois, Arizona, and in other locations. The purpose and effect of this surveillance was to discourage legally and constitutionally protected rights of assembly and free speech.

In other recent incidents postal inspectors have been used to interrogate an employee accused of drinking a beer in a postal service parking lot; to investigate the nonpostal earnings of a postal worker illegally fired by the Postal Service and ordered reinstated with back pay; and to interrogate a worker accused of falsifying his time records.

Postal inspection investigations in labor relations cases are complete with guns, badges, handcuffs, and Miranda warnings. Without some strong reason to believe that some crime has or will be committed by postal employees, the use of postal inspectors in labor relations matters harks back to the days of the Pinkertons, and can only serve to deter employees in the exercise of their legally guaranteed right to engage in union activities. Postal employees should not be subject to fear that filing a grievance or engaging in peaceful informational picketing will result in heavy-handed postal police surveillance, interrogations, and investigations.¹

As long as the PIS continues to exert such a strong influence on postal management and involves itself in the labor relations area of the postal service, it is improbable that any credible form of modern participatory management methods will dominate the postal environment.

¹"Biller Backs 'Right to Strike,' Collective Bargaining Changes in PRA Congressional Testimony," The American Postal Worker, August 1982, p. 26.

TABLE 3.--Total Occupational Distribution of Postal Employees 1968-1980

Employee Category	1980	% of Workers	1976	% of Workers	1972	% of Workers	1968	% of Workers
Headquarters employees	2,798	00.4	2,608	00.4	2,301	00.3	2,489	00.3
Field Regular employees:								
Regional/other field units	6,228	00.9	4,877	00.7	5,460	00.8	5,954	00.8
Inspection service	5,242	00.8	5,451	00.8	4,716	00.7	1,759	00.2
Postmasters	28,967	04.3	29,273	04.3	30,731	04.3	31,736	04.3
Supervisors & Technical personnel	36,481	05.5	38,541	05.7	38,102	05.4	34,903	04.8
Clerks & Mail Handlers	229,232	34.4	235,220	34.6	250,390	35.4	238,774	32.7
City Delivery Carriers & Vehicle drivers	160,348	24.0	160,681	23.7	174,974	24.8	158,104	21.6
Rural Delivery carriers	32,863	04.9	30,949	04.6	31,024	04.4	30,856	04.2
Special Delivery Messengers	1,987	00.3	2,666	00.4	3,205	00.5	2,858	00.4
Bldg./Equip. Maintenance personnel	27,586	04.1	27,297	04.0	23,962	03.4	20,204	02.8
Vehicle Maintenance facility personnel	4,641	00.7	4,841	00.7	5,823	00.8	4,664	00.6
Total	536,373	80.4	542,604	79.9	570,688	80.7	532,301	72.8
Total other emps.	130,450	19.5	136,345	20.1	135,712	19.2	198,676	27.1
GRAND TOTAL	666,823		678,949		706,400		730,977	

SOURCES: Annual Report of the Postmaster General, 1973, p. 39, and Annual Report of the Postmaster General, 1981, p. 31.

NOTE: Percentages do not appear in original reports.

Salary gains

Postal employees, while having surrendered much of their autonomy and control over the work environment during the decade of collective bargaining, have made considerable improvement in their salary structure.

The previous four agreements, the annual salary of a level five, step ten, postal worker had by July 24, 1982 risen to \$22,307 with the starting annual salary of \$20,129. A comparison of postal worker and similarly-classified employee salaries in other federal services highlights the impact of collective bargaining on wages.

TABLE 4

Comparison of Salary Gains
General Service vs. Postal Service
1970-1981

	<u>GS-5, Step 4</u>	<u>PS-5, Step 4</u>
GAIN: 1970 to 1981 Dollars	\$ +6,291	\$ +12,492
1970 to 1981 Per Cent	+87.4	+173.5

SOURCE: Michael L. Wachter and Jeffrey M. Perloff:
"An Evaluation of U.S. Postal Service Wages." Paper
presented at the 1981 National Negotiations between
the USPS and the postal unions, Washington, D.C.,
July 1981, Table 4.

Collective bargaining in federal sector opposed

In 1979, the Comptroller General issued an elaborate report to Congress which analyzed the comparative growth in postal and other federal employee compensation. Starting

with December 1969, when the annual salaries for a grade five, step four postal and general service employee were equal (\$7,202), and proceeding to December 1977, when the postal salary was \$14,309, while the GS pay was \$10,955,¹ the report concluded:

Since reorganization, wage negotiations have brought about higher pay increases for postal employees covered by collective bargaining. These increases have exceeded pay increases for other federal workers and brought greater compensation for comparable work in the federal sector and certain sections of the private sectors. . . .

Certain other postal employees--first-line supervisors and lower level white-collar postal employees--that have a direct relationship with postal bargaining employees have also received higher pay increases. Salaries for postal employees in some professional and management positions, however, have not done as well because they do not have a direct relationship with bargaining employees.²

With the obvious relationship between collective bargaining and improved wages for postal workers firmly established, the report goes on to warn that a possible consequence of this fact could be increased unionization, a movement by "other federal employee groups to regard collective bargaining for wages as a preferred alternative to the present pay adjustment systems."³ Finally, as a means of preventing the spread of collective bargaining, as it exists for postal workers, to other federal employee groups, the report suggests that Congress consider the need for budgetary controls or constraints that exist for bargaining groups in the

¹Report to the Congress, February 1, 1979, p. 16

²Ibid, p. 29-30, Ibid, p. 43, Ibid, pp. 43, 44.

private sector and other levels of government when collective bargaining for wages is proposed.¹

Dissent in the federal sector

In 1971, the postal model for collective bargaining appeared as if it would spread throughout the federal sector, yet this was not the case a decade later. The 1981 strike by the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization and the destruction of that union by the Reagan Administration is a grim but glaring example of the need for an alternative to the pay adjustment system in the federal sector. The failure of the air traffic controllers, a well organized group that was able to have more than 80 percent of its fourteen thousand members participate in the strike, has been blamed on a number of things. Most important, is the fact that they were not able to effectively shut down the air traffic system. Related to this was their inability to obtain little more than verbal support from American labor. An additional factor which contributed to the controllers' demise was the size of their organization. The absolute number of individuals was relatively small, considering their nationwide dispersal.

The anti-labor Reagan Administration is not likely to confront the entire federal work force simultaneously. It is, however, aggressively attacking select groups of government employees. Pay cuts, furloughs, job

¹Ibid, pp. 43, 44

eliminations and reductions in work force have been directed at federal employees of more than a dozen agencies including the Government Printing Office and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. On June 29, 1982, more than three thousand employees of the Government Printing Office gathered at the Capitol to demonstrate against the proposed pay cuts and furloughs. There were scattered shouts of "Strike! Strike!" from the angry crowd but few observers took the threat seriously. These approximately six thousand employees, if they did strike, would be more vulnerable than the air traffic controllers.

It will take large-scale and well-organized collective action on the part of federal workers if they are to achieve true collective bargaining. The wage gains postal workers have received through collective bargaining, particularly in relation to other federal employees, have increased the opposition to salary negotiations in the federal sector. It took a great struggle to secure collective bargaining for the postal workers and that is the only way other federal employees will achieve the same.

Postal workers and the Reagan Administration

Although collective bargaining has greatly reduced the role of Congress in postal matters, it has not diminished the energies that postal unions devote to lobbying. More time, money and energy is being spent in this area now than at any

time in the past. The emphasis on lobbying and political action among postal workers has reached a peak and is now the major focus of postal union activity. This has developed in the face of sweeping attacks by the Reagan Administration, which are viewed by the postal union leaders as designed to destroy the American postal system and its employees. Addressing this issue, the NALC advised its members that there is an Administration in Washington that is directly attacking their economic well-being and that of their families, and the only way to preserve their jobs and retirement is to become active in the political arena.

Issues involving the postal unions and the White House include the Reagan Administration's attempts to:

1. Combine Social Security with the Civil Service Retirement System
2. Change the COLA indexing system
3. Raise the age for retirement eligibility
4. Restrict the annuity and cost of living adjustments
5. Dismantle the Federal Employees Compensation Act
6. Revise the private express statutes
7. Reduce benefits while raising the premiums and deductables of Federal Employee Health Benefit plans
8. Prevent the United States Postal Service from being involved in electronic mail
9. Eliminate the public service subsidy of the United States Postal Service

To combat these efforts of the Reagan Administration, the postal unions have launched a nationwide grass roots legislative program and voter registration drive. In addition, the NALC and APWU have mounted a direct-mail fund raising drive for their political action committees. They are also conducting a series of legislative training seminars for their memberships. The fund raising drives have been quite successful. NALC reported that contributions from 21,000 of its 240,000 members totaled \$316,438.67,¹ while the APWU reported that its previous COPA Fund had never raised more than \$34,000 in a single year, yet was currently approaching \$350,000 in contributions.²

In addition to lobbying for specific issues, the postal unions are directing their energies and dollars toward electing friends and defeating enemies in congressional elections. The first results of these intense efforts by the postal unions will be available after the fall 1982 votes are tabulated. It will be interesting to see how much influence the union will have had on the voting behavior of its members and whether or not that influence, if it does materialize, can be sustained for the national elections in 1984.

¹ NALC Bulletin, No. 20, June 25, 1982.

² Moe Biller, "Communicating Directly With You, the Member," The American Postal Worker, August, 1982, p. 2.

Postal solidarity and the
possibility of one big union
for postal workers

While the postal unions appear to be united in their lobbying efforts, this solidarity seldom carries over to other areas. Craft distinctions, internal structures, jurisdictional disputes and personal egos, fears and animosities among the union leadership serve as barriers to any possibility that there will be one union representing all postal workers. Nor is it likely that two unions, one for the inside workers, the other representing outside workers, which was raised at the time of reorganization, will materialize.

Attempts to merge the National Association of Letter Carriers with the National Rural Letter Carriers Association failed as did the NALC's efforts to organize the rural carriers. The American Postal Workers Union was similarly unseccessful in its raid upon the membership of the Mail-handlers' Union, (LIUNA). There is a great dislike and distrust between the leadership of LIUNA and that of the NALC and APWU. Even the "solidarity" of the APWU and NALC, expressed during the 1981 negotiations has declined. The two unions clashed during a recent drive to increase enrollments in their respective medical plans. The result of that highly-charged campaign was a net gain of more than 76,000 members in the NALC Health Benefit Plan with 18,079

of these new enrollments postal employees.¹ The APWU, meanwhile, lost almost 18,000 members, of which 16,000 were postal workers. With a merger improbable at this time, the only other way postal workers could be joined into one big union would be through a successful organizing drive by one of the unions. This is not likely to occur as long as APWU and NALC are members of the AFL-CIO and, therefore, bound by the "no raiding" policy of that federation.

Union democracy

The struggle for union democracy among postal workers reached its peak at the 1972 NALC National Convention. At that gathering the National Rank & File Movement clashed head-on with the national union leadership over the issues of "one man-one vote," regional elections for regional representatives, and contract ratification by referendum vote of the entire membership. The National Rank & File Movement was an outgrowth of the Rank & File Party, the dissident group in New York City that had ousted the incumbent letter carrier leadership after the 1970 strike. The Rank & File had been founded upon and was committed to the democratic principles of trade unionism. During the 1971 struggle over the Branch 36 trusteeship, the Rank & File refused to compromise those principles and successfully

¹NALC Bulletin, No. 24, July 30, 1982

defended local autonomy and the right to dissent against the national union's attempts to impose its authoritarian and undemocratic rule on local branches of the NALC. By 1974, the principles espoused by the Rank & File had been adopted by the national union leadership.

The decline of union democracy

The split in the Rank & File Party in New York City in 1974, marked the turning point in the movement for a more democratic union. Shortly after their election in January 1975, the successful faction of Branch 36 moved away from many of the Rank & File principles and practices. Branch by-laws were altered giving the president more authority. The method of electing branch officers was changed from machine voting to mail balloting. This led to a series of contested elections and at least one re-run of a branch election mandated by the U. S. Department of Labor. Mail balloting has also resulted in a decreasing number of active letter carriers and a greater number of retired members participating in the elections. The retired members vote at a much higher rate than the active carriers and almost entirely in favor of the incumbents. In the 1970 Branch 36 elections 3,984 letter carriers voted by machine with less than 300 of these votes by retirees. It is likely that the incumbent union leadership would not have been defeated by the Rank & File Party candidates in

1970 if the method of voting in Branch 36 had been by mail rather than machine.

Reconciliation with the
national union

Following their election in 1975, the successful faction of Branch 36 moved toward reconciliation with the old-line Johnson supporters locally and the conservative Rademacher forces nationally. The National Rank & File Movement was abandoned in favor of the more "respectable" Committee of Presidents. Branch 36 no longer supported insurgent candidates across the nation; rather it allied itself with whomever held elected office in the NALC. The defeated faction of the Rank & File Party was virtually barred from active participation in local union activities. The failure of the defeated Rank & File faction to effectively sustain a viable two-party system in Branch 36 was largely due to the fact that the principles of union democracy had not permeated the value system of a majority of the members. Rather, these principles were concentrated primarily within the group of defeated activists. These factors contributed to the demise of union democracy within the branch.

While the Branch 36 administration was dismantling democratic procedures on the local level, they were championing them nationally. The one-man, one-vote issue provided a popular platform on which to run for national

office.

The principle of contract ratification coupled with the one-man, one-vote process ultimately led to the election of the insurgents to national NALC offices on the heels of the membership's rejection of the proposed 1978 National Agreement.

The future of union
democracy in the
postal unions

Union democracy has not fared well in any of the major postal unions. The National Rural Letter Carrier Association has retained proxy voting at convention for national officers and has no provision for membership ratification of national contracts. The Mailhandlers' Union, (LIUNA), does have a limited ratification process but also elects its national officers at convention. The APWU, basically structured to function in a democratic fashion, has become increasingly autocratic. In the APWU, the future of union democracy will be determined to a large degree by the present opposition to the national president. In the NALC there is no longer an active rank and file nor any visible critics of the national administration. Union democracy seems to have reached a peak in the postal unions and is now on the decline. For union democracy to be an important enough issue for postal workers to incorporate into their value systems, it will have to be linked to

their present priorities--wages, benefits, and job security. The fact that postal workers have received the largest wage increases and benefit packages, during opposition to the various union administrations should be publicized. Increased benefits for postal workers is related to increased organization and activity among the membership. The reverse is also true, as the present situation of postal workers affirms.

Occupational culture and the work environment

Postal reorganization has also had a dramatic impact on the occupational community of postal workers. Scientific management, new technology, and the relocation of major postal facilities have caused changes in both the formal and informal relationships of postal workers. A recent study comments on the relocation strategy of the USPS:

The new postal facilities were not located in the heart of any neighborhood, surrounded by various social institutions. Nor have such institutions developed. Most postal workers live too far from the new facilities to be willing to add to their time away from home hanging around after work.¹

The report goes on to describe the new postal installations

¹ Peter Rachleff and The Work Environment Project, Moving the Mail: From a Manual Case to Outer Space. (Morgantown, W.VA: Work Environment Project, 1982), p. 21.

and then states:

"Postal management officials have designed these bleak facilities in such a way as to maximize their control over workers. The results are strikingly similar to a prison yard."¹

Ultimately the report concludes:

These, then, have been the effects of the relocation of major postal facilities-a decline in the percentage of minority workers, the reorganization of the overall work force, and the disruption of long-established social organization inside and outside the workplace. Postal management, committed to full-scale mechanization and eager to avoid labor conflict, had its hand immensely strengthened by this aspect of postal reorganization.²

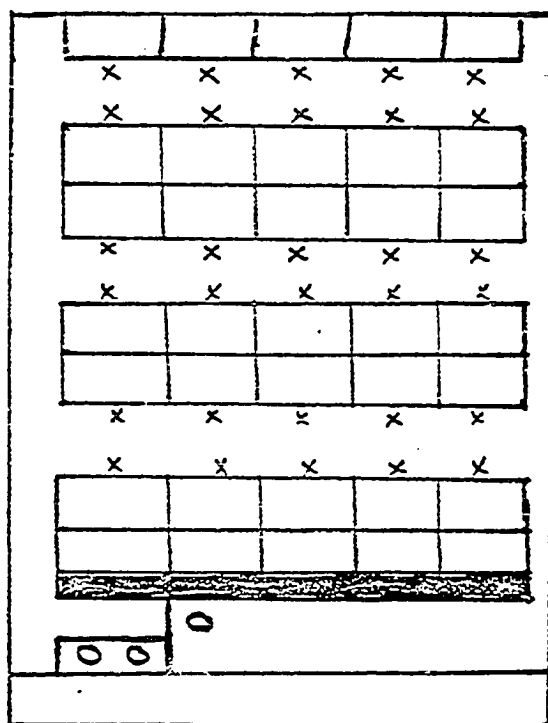
Increasing surveillance

The scientific management methods of the USPS have had an impact on the entire postal work force. While all employees have been subjected to increased supervision and surveillance and the work environments of the clerks and mailhandlers have become increasingly machine-paced and isolated, the letter carriers have also been affected. At the General Post Office in Manhattan, the number of letter carriers has gone from more than three hundred in 1970, to less than two hundred by the end of 1981. Special delivery has all but been eliminated and what remains has been decentralized, i.e., delivered from each postal station, usually by the first-class or parcel post carriers.

¹Ibid., p. 22 ²Ibid, p. 22.

The previously loosely-supervised carriers now constantly work under the scrutiny of management while inside the post office, and have been subject to an increasing amount of supervision and surveillance while on their delivery routes. It is not uncommon for a supervisor to appear on a carrier's route "to see how he is doing."

Pre 1981



0 - supervisor

Inside the post office, the carriers' work area has been reconstructed. Previously the carriers prepared their mail in aisles separated from the supervisors office space; they now work in a circular design with the boss's desk situated in the center of the carriers' work area. Furthermore, the cases have been changed from flat to L-shaped, thereby isolating each carrier in a kind of cubby-hole setting. Cooperative work efforts among the carriers have been greatly reduced.

Altered routes and staggered work schedules

Another management strategy that has fragmented the work environment of the GPO carriers is the altering of routes and work schedules. The first-class carriers no longer all start and end their tour of duty at the same time. Some routes now begin at 5:00 A.M. or 5:30 A.M., while others remain at the once uniform 6:00 A.M. Subsequently, the carriers end their tour of duty at different times of day. Commenting on the effect this tour change has had on some of the carriers, Al, a carrier with almost twenty years seniority says:

The changes have really screwed things up. There's no real reason for them except to harass the workers. It was bad enough. I mean getting up so early and travelling at that ungodly hour. Now it's worse. I mean, the trains are not running as often, it's more dangerous and nobody gives a damn.

Steve, another senior carrier adds:

We used to have a car pool. About five or six of us would drive in from Queens every day. We tried it for awhile after they changed the tours but it just didn't work out. People have different commitments, second jobs, kids getting home from school, wife working. Waiting around for the guys with different tours just didn't work out. Everybody is pretty much on their own now.

Perhaps the most effective management strategy for further fragmenting the carrier workforce is the recently implemented "model cities program." This management plan has caused the readjustment of almost every first-class carrier route in GPO. Designed on the time and motion principles of scientific management, this program attempts to eliminate the multiple routes by having no more than one carrier assigned to any one route. The only routes retaining more than one carrier will be those consisting of only one large office building. By creating single-person routes management not only isolates the carriers from each other, it also increases its ability to surveil the individual carrier. The "model cities program" has also caused many of the carriers to lose their "personal places." Accompanying the adjustments to one-person routes were changes in the makeup of the routes. Carriers who had been delivering to particular patrons and locations for as long as thirty years were notified that certain stops would no longer be on their route. With new stops added, old stops taken away and the geographic area of most routes reduced, many carriers no longer had access to the "personal places"

they had developed and depended upon for privacy and protection. Many of the carriers have found new "personal places" but they are not as likely to share them as they were in the past. Some share their "personal place" with their old partners, although the "place" now is only on one carrier's route where before it was a part of the larger multiple carrier route.

The increased surveillance and discipline by postal management has caused the always-cautious carriers to guard their territory and "personal places" even more carefully than in the past. Carriers on multiple routes had developed a system of trust and interdependence among their partners; now the carrier on a single-person route operates independently.

Casual employees

Postal management has added to the internal labor market segmentation of postal workers by hiring an increasing number of "casual" employees. These workers are hired to perform carrier, clerk, and mailhandler tasks. They are paid a little more than one-half of the hourly rate of pay, receive no benefits and cannot be represented by the unions. They are hired from the list of people who have qualified on the post office entrance examination and are waiting to be called for permanent positions. The "casual" employees are limited to two ninety-day terms of casual employment in a calendar year and an additional twenty-one day period

during the Christmas rush.¹

Informal control systems

The ability of the regular carriers to control their work environment has been reduced further. Floaters are no longer selected by the regular route person but are bid by seniority for a cycle of five routes, one of which they work each day. Formerly a floater was selected by the regular carrier and worked the same route almost every day. This practice has been eliminated in all but a few remaining multiple routes. With the floaters no longer dependent upon the regular route person for work assignments, the senior carriers are less able to control their work environment. Their unofficial reward system devised by the carriers has lost some of its effectiveness. Letter carriers still share their gratuities and bestow gifts upon cooperative subs, floaters, clerks and supervisors, however, the need for this extra compensation is not as great among these postal employees since their wages have so greatly improved. A senior letter carrier commented on the change in this tradition:

Everything is changing around here. Now that everyone is making more money and there's plenty of overtime, especially for the clerks, everyone is becoming independent. The floaters are uppity and you can't do much about it. The bosses are uptight or something. Some of them won't even accept a pay-off anymore. I've been giving Mr. . . . an envelope every Christmas for the past fifteen years. This year he wouldn't take it.

¹Agreement Between USPS and APWU, AFL-CIO, NALC, AFL-CIO, July 21, 1981-July 20, 1984, Article 7, Sec. 1B.4.

I thought maybe he was nervous or something so I talked to him in private. We get along pretty good. He told me he wasn't accepting gifts from anyone anymore. So I bought him a bottle of booze but he wouldn't even take that. When I asked him why, he said, "I'm on another level now."

Patterns of socialization

The division of labor continues to affect the socialization patterns of postal workers. While the relocation of postal facilities has destroyed many of the traditional networks of social interaction, other variables have also contributed to a change in the social habits of postal workers. At the Manhattan GPO, increased management supervision, surveillance and discipline have resulted in the virtual abandonment of the "swing room" as the primary area of social interaction within the postal facility. The card games and other gambling activities have all but disappeared. Only during lunch periods and official breaks are large numbers of postal workers found socializing in the "swing room". Letter carriers are seldom in the GPO "swing room" for any reason.

The staggered shifts, reduced work force, increased overtime, disintegration of special delivery, decline of parcel post, new technology, one-person routes, scientific management methods and greater internal labor market segmentation have served to reduce the amount of traditional social interaction patterns of postal workers. One group, however, "the drinkers,"-- employees who are considered by other workers to have "a problem" has increased

in number. Where previously almost always one, and never more than two or three could be found in a local tavern for hours each day, groups of five, six and eight are now commonplace on all tours and among all classifications of employees. While the number of "problem drinkers" has increased, the number of "casual drinkers" has decreased. No longer are large numbers of postal workers seen in the taverns even on paydays. Jim, a carrier for more than thirty years, explains why he no longer frequents the taverns near GPO:

Used to be you could hang around, have a few drinks, some laughs, you know, a good time, blow off steam, relax, whatever. Now it's not the same, you know, a lot of the old timers have retired and most of the guys that are left are all spread out, you know, they live all over the place. You don't want to be left around here by yourself or caught going home on the train by yourself, especially if you've had a few drinks and have two weeks' pay in your pocket. Truth is, I don't even cash my check around here anymore.

Race, sex and social interaction

Among the postal workers at GPO, the division of labor as well as race, sex and job classification affect the patterns of social interaction. Tours of duty and job function are the primary determinants of socialization patterns. Social groups are segregated by job status with regulars and subs found in separate groupings. Where there are large numbers of black, white, male and female employees on the same tour, performing similar duties and having the same job classification, social groupings also reflect

the variables of sex and race. Men and women rarely socialize together and most groups are further divided by race. Blacks, whites and Hispanics are usually found in their own ethnic or social gathering. Off the job socialization is even more segregated. The women, however, are more likely to be involved in an integrated social group than are the men. It is not uncommon to see groups of female postal workers, black and white, socializing on or near the job. The black and women's liberation movements have undoubtedly contributed to the formation and maintenance of sub-groups based on race and gender. The fact that women only entered the postal crafts in large numbers beginning in 1964, added to their separate status. As newcomers the women were assigned to the least desired shifts. The few who entered the letter carrier craft were primarily subs or floaters. Not until the 1970s did any female obtain a regular route. By 1980, only a handful of women were regular routepersons. The increased surveillance, dismantling of the multiple person routes, and general decline in workplace cohesiveness and worker solidarity have prevented a higher level of integration from actualizing among the carriers. Even when a woman has achieved formal recognition from the letter carriers she has not yet been accepted in the informal circles. Although the GPO carriers have elected a woman as their chief shop steward, the men do not socialize nor share their "personal places" with her.

Women and the postal unions

None of the national officers in any of the postal unions is a woman. In the APWU, where more than 30 percent of the membership is female, a national organization, Post Office Women for Equal Rights (POWER), has been granted official status within the union. The first national conference of POWER, held in St. Louis, Missouri in April 1979, attracted 125 women. In 1980, approximately 200 women attended the group's second conference in Detroit, Michigan. Following official recognition of POWER at the 1980 national APWU convention, a third meeting in Seattle, Washington in May 1981, drew more than 200 women. At that meeting, regional coordinators and alternates were elected, the structure expanded and a series of resolutions adopted. The group aims to establish local and state women's committees with a major goal the equalization of leadership positions within the APWU.

In 1981, three women were elected to the top positions in an area local for the first time in APWU history. Women hold local presidential positions in a number of cities. In New York a woman heads APWU's largest local, the twenty-thousand member New York Metro Area Postal Union. It is likely that the political division and opposition to the incumbent APWU administration will result in the election of at least one woman to national office in the 1983 elections.

Approximately 5 percent or 9,400 of the 188,000 working letter carriers are women. There is no organized women's caucus within the NALC and although there are women in local leadership positions, none has attained national prominence or headed any large local. Women are not yet a political force within the NALC.

Women and
postal management

In 1974, women comprised about 20 percent of the postal work force.¹ Most of these women were clerks, although a fair number of postmasterships in small communities were also held by women. By 1980, 12.2 percent of the mid-level management force were female and women accounted for 25 percent of the postal work force.² Since postal reorganization, even the Postal Inspection Service has been opened to women. By 1982, ninety-one women were serving in the ranks of postal inspectors.³ Women are found in increasing numbers at almost every level of postal service management and one is currently serving as Assistant Postmaster General, Employee Relations Department. No woman, however, serves on the Board of Governors or the Executive Committee of the USPS.

¹"History of USPS," Postscript, July-Aug. 1981, p.4.

²Ibid.

³USPS Publication 100, March 1982, p. 16.

Relative deprivation

Relative deprivation, which was a major contributing factor to the collective activities of postal workers, including the Great Postal Strike of 1970, remains a key concept in analyzing the behavior of postal workers today. In 1969 and 1970, postal workers felt and were relatively deprived when they compared themselves to many other public sector workers and blue collar employees, particularly in the N.Y. area where the strike began. This is not the case today. Postal workers no longer perceive themselves as relatively deprived. Their wage and benefit packages are comparable to a large segment of the public sector employees and superior to a majority of blue collar workers. They have witnessed the large scale layoffs of American workers including many in the public sector. The fact that postal workers, after six years of continuous service, have lifetime job security while their earnings have achieved comparability, has served to eliminate their feeling of relative deprivation and inhibited any motivation toward militant collective action. Postal workers, when asked to compare their job today and before the 1970 strike and reorganization, invariably say, "the pay is much better." They also almost always add, "but the job has gotten much worse." Employees not able to compare the pre-reorganization period to today because they have not been working in the postal service for more than a few

years speak more favorably about the postal environment than do the senior employees. Vincent, a 26 year-old sub carrier for nearly two years, reflects the feelings of many junior postal workers when he says:

This is a pretty good job. Where else can you make \$20,000 a year with no education or real good trade? I've got friends who graduated college and don't make what I do. Sure there's a lot of chicken-shit that goes on around here but its no worse than anyplace else and it's not like I'm breaking my back for a living. The old-timers complain because the work's not like it used to be but when they had it real easy they didn't make enough money and they complained about that. Sure the bosses "break chops" sometimes and no doubt a lot of things about the job could be better. If the regulars really think this job is so terrible, why don't they retire and open up some places for us? Look, we do most of the harder work around here but I'm not complaining--not so long as I can make my twenty grand

With money no longer a major issue and working conditions perceived from such divergent views, the possibility of obtaining a consensus on any militant collective action becomes increasingly remote.

Militancy and ideology

The motivation which resulted in the militant activism of postal workers in 1969 and through the mid 1970s was based on materialism and the workers' concern for self improvement. There was no ideology nor commitment to a social movement. The goals of the postal workers have been limited to their own environment. Even the issue of union democracy has only briefly been manifested as a priority among postal workers and that ideal was primarily a major

concern of an insurgent minority. If one is to attempt to apply a labor movement theory to the activity of postal workers in the period 1969-1981, it is Selig Perlman's hypothesis that is most appropriate. Perlman believed that workers were primarily motivated by a "fundamental scarcity consciousness".¹ Unions, according to Perlman, negotiated not so much to alter the capitalist system as to receive a sufficient share of it. Perlman's theory has been criticized as restricted because it is basically limited to describing the formative and somewhat regressive period of American trade unions in the 1920s. Yet, it is precisely that feature of Perlman's theory that makes it so appropriate when applied to today's postal environment. The postal unions, only recently exerting themselves as other labor groups have, beginning with the Great Postal Strike of 1970, and continuing with their coming under the jurisdiction of common labor law and contemporary collective bargaining relationships, are still very much in the formative stage Perlman so adequately described. They do not espouse a social program, nor are they steeped in any ideology other than obtaining as much in the area of wages as possible. Following the wage priority among postal workers are the issues of work opportunity and protectivism, items emphasized by Perlman

¹Selig Perlman, Theory of the Labor Movement (New York August Kelley, 1928, reprinted 1949), p. 278.

as basic to, and at the center of, the ideology of American trade unions.

Epilogue

The postal workers today are at a crossroad. In 1970, they took an extreme action against a system that was unresponsive to their needs. Their collective action had a profound effect on the organizational structure of the postal service and the postal unions. The decade following the Great Strike of 1970, saw postal workers achieve significant gains in their salary structure. After ten years of collective bargaining, wage increases have leveled off, while postal workers' control over their work environment has been drastically reduced. The unions, recognizing their diminishing effectiveness at the bargaining table and cognizant of the legislative assault the Reagan Administration has launched against them, have shifted their energies and emphasis to lobbying in the political arena for solutions to problems facing postal workers. In the political as well as in the collective bargaining sphere the unions find themselves struggling not so much for what can be gained but for what might not be lost.

It is not likely that postal workers will rise up en masse as they did in 1970 and attempt to change the structure of labor-management in the USPS before they first

alter the internal structure and leadership of their unions. It took a great struggle for postal workers to achieve collective bargaining and some degree of union democracy during the 1970s. It may take an even greater struggle to assure the continuation of these ideals.

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