

Three-and-a-Half Years Later, Trenton P&DC Re-Opens

Arbitrator Rules for Workers Displaced by Anthrax Attacks

The Trenton P&DC, closed in the wake of anthrax terrorist attacks nearly three-and-a-half years ago, re-opened its retail services March 14, with its processing workers expected to return to the facility shortly.

“I’m fully satisfied with the renovation,” said Bill Lewis, president of APWU’s Trenton Metro Area Local. Testing of equipment has been ongoing for several months. “I’ve been putting in time there as a mechanic for several months, and I’m satisfied that it’s safe there.”

APWU President William Burrus attended ribbon-cutting ceremonies in Trenton on March 13. “Postal workers are to be commended for the courage displayed during the anthrax attacks,” he said. “Trenton postal workers showed remarkable perseverance while working under difficult circumstances as their facility was being decontaminated and during the lengthy renovations.”

The opening came less than a month after an arbitrator ruled in favor of the Trenton local in a grievance related to extra travel time put in by postal workers forced to work in temporary duty stations following the anthrax attacks.

Arbitrator Michael J. Pecklers on Feb. 21 sustained a

union grievance in full, finding that the USPS violated Article 19 and 36 of the National Agreement with its failure to pay travel time to employees who were reassigned following the closing of the Trenton P&DC.

Lewis said that more than 550 union members in all three crafts would receive a monetary award as a result of the arbitrator’s ruling. “In some cases, we’re talking about more than three years of overtime,” the local president said.

Several anthrax-contaminated letters passed through the suburban Trenton (Hamilton Township) mail center in fall 2001, not long after the 9/11 attacks. There were five confirmed anthrax infections and two suspected cases in New Jersey, but no fatalities in the state. Nationwide, five people died, including two postal workers – APWU members Thomas L. Morris and Joseph P. Curseen Jr.

Since the decontamination was completed a year ago, none of the tests performed at the Trenton P&DC has detected any anthrax or any other biological agent.

About a dozen Hamilton postal workers have said they do not wish to return to the building, Lewis said, and they will be assigned to other postal centers.

Action Expected on Postal ‘Reform’ Legislation

Legislation to overhaul the Postal Service is on track to be presented in the Senate soon, and discussions between the White House and key Capitol Hill committee members are ongoing.

“We’re concerned about all the issues under discussion,” said APWU President William Burrus. In addition to tracking proposals that would affect matters on the workforce and in the paycheck, the union is monitoring whether the USPS will continue to be responsible for the retirement costs for military service of USPS employees (no other federal agency pays these costs) and whether as much as \$70 million in overpayments to the Civil Service Retirement Fund will be released from escrow, and how much discretion the Postal Service will be given in the use of such funds.

“The APWU remains vigilant on many issues,” Burrus said. “We’ve learned of attempts to weaken the ‘worksharing’ limitations adopted by the Senate committee last year, and about restrictions on the USPS authority to increase rates.”

The APWU also is concerned about potential changes to the pricing and classification of single-piece parcel-post mail that could force the Postal Service to discontinue providing the service, and reductions to compensation for employees who are injured on the job.

Some anti-union proposals have been circulated – but to date they have not been included in drafts of the Senate legislation. These include a request by the USPS Board of Governors and the Postmaster General that would require the union to negotiate for benefits – such as healthcare and retirement – that are currently guaranteed by law, and a proposal that would require arbitrators to factor into their decisions on postal worker contracts a selective set of economic criteria.

The APWU is involved in the discussions, Burrus said. “Any consideration of the flagrantly anti-worker amendments,” he said, “would require us to use all of our resources to defeat this effort at ‘reforming’ the Postal Service.”