

At Opening of Contract Talks, Union Breaks with Tradition

Contract negotiations between the American Postal Workers Union and the U.S. Postal Service got underway on Feb. 19 with a dramatic break from tradition. Joining the APWU at the opening session were actor-activist Danny Glover and AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, who made brief remarks following a statement by President Mark Dimondstein. Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, also joined APWU negotiators at the bargaining table.

The inclusion of special guests was designed to send a message: The U.S. Postal Service belongs to the people, and the people have a stake in the union's fight to protect and strengthen a great national treasure. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-DC), Jim Hightower (editor of the *Hightower Lowdown*) and numerous labor leaders also observed the session. All of the union's national officers attended, along with the Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee, and union members from nearby locals.



Dimondstein delivers opening statement.

amounts for performing the same work, he said. "We want an end to the situation where new hires can barely make a living wage and where full-time career workers are replaced." Postal workers should be fairly compensated and enjoy a dignified retirement when their careers end, he said.

The union is advocating for a vibrant Postal Service for generations to come. "We will be putting forth proposals for

maintaining overnight delivery standards, halting plant closings, expanding hours of service and staffing for the customers, and providing financial services such as postal banking," Dimondstein said.

Danny Glover – the son of postal workers – said the negotiations would have a major impact on the future of the USPS and his community. "I hope that

we will honor the possibilities of re-imagining not only our relationship to each other, but also to the customers, to the other citizens of this great country." Glover has called on the public to join A Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service.

Passionate About the Mission

"The APWU is passionate in our support for the crucial mission of the public Postal Service," Dimondstein said. But the mission is threatened by a congressionally-manufactured financial crisis, by those on Wall Street who would like to get their hands on the Postal Service's \$65 billion in annual revenue, and by ideologues who oppose public services, he said.

The union welcomes the opportunity for change brought about by the appointment of Postmaster General Megan Brennan, he added, but recent management policies have led to degraded service, delay of the mail, significant subcontracting, and partial privatization.

"Our members are deeply dissatisfied with the current state of affairs," Dimondstein said. We want an end to the three-tiered structure that pays workers very different

Reverse a 'Devastating Tale'

Richard Trumka spoke on behalf of 12.5 million members of the AFL-CIO. "These bargaining sessions are important to the United States and to working families everywhere," he said. "For decades the USPS has been a source of good jobs and reliable service. Postal services have been a cornerstone for all the communities in our great nation. That's what the flag means. That's what the emblem on the side of post offices and on delivery trucks everywhere means."

"The income gap between wealthiest and the rest of us is wider than any time in the last century and this brutal fact threatens to drag down our entire national economy," Trumka remarked. "Yet, right here, workers are sitting across the table from management in a process that can truly reverse that devastating tale."