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If you don't believe in anything ...



you'll fall for everything!

AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION FLORIDA KEYS AREA LOCAL

KEYS BREEZE

GAG ORDER!

To paraphrase Shakespeare, "Something's rotten in Denmark." We have all seen a significant decline in the quality of service by Keys post offices over the past few years. The APWU has been pounding the drum to alert the public as to the magnitude of this decline for some time. You know, if something smells rotten, it usually is. On May 4th, something *really* started to stink.

We all know how management disseminates information to employees. A supervisor calls a stand-up talk. Last month the Key West postmaster quietly, almost clandestinely, admonished each employee through private, individual talks that any disparaging remarks made against the USPS while on the clock would be met with disciplinary action.

What's with all this secret one-on-one with the top dog in the corner? When something out of the ordinary happens, you can bet some capo in Miami is playing the fiddle and the local minions are dancing to the tune.

When the USPS announced plans to reduce the workforce nationwide, the South Florida District followed like a rat behind the Pied Piper. Fortunately, the public and local media rallied. With the help of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the district relented in their effort to force Keys employees to relocate.

Goliath merely stumbled, however. As time advanced, many employees transferred, retired, passed away or quit. Loss through attrition has manifested into the decline in service that is apparent today, exactly as the USPS had originally planned.

What's behind their agenda? Remember how the country was duped into believing Iraq had those weapons of mass destruction, how we needed to invade Iraq for our safety? We all know how *that* turned out. Keep that in the back of your mind and stay with me.

The Bush administration has assembled a kangaroo court disguised as a committee tasked to study "the postal problem". They're supposed to make "recommendations" on how

to "improve" the Postal Service (they use the term "postal reform"). Their ultimate goal, however, is not to reform but to *out-source* postal services to private firms. That idea, however, is not very popular with the public right now based on a survey showing overwhelming satisfaction with the Postal Service among all government agencies. This is largely due to postal unions fighting to preserve that level of service.

This survey poses a huge problem for those seeking to slice up the pie. That is, how can public opinion be *changed* to justify the chop shop? Simple. Intentionally grind the service into the ground to antagonize the public with poor service, then convince America that "postal reform" is essential to "improve" the service. It's another Iraq-styled snow job. Create a problem that doesn't exist, then sell the "solution" politically. Are you with me?

The administration's main obstacle is those annoying postal unions! They're spoiling everything! I can just hear their back room whispers now, "How can employees be stopped from exposing us? We need to censure them! We can dictate what they do on the job so let's issue a gag order so nothing "disparaging" can be said about us. Heaven forbid the public starts learning the truth. They might contact their congressional representatives and we might be held accountable!"

If you thought 37 cents to mail a letter is outrageous now, just wait until you buy into "postal reform!" How many Enrons, Tycos, and Worldcoms will it take before the Greed Virus infects your mail service? Don't let corporate profiteering and its government bedfellow scam you into giving up your affordable mail service. Just as the current administration sold our national forests to the lumber industry, don't sit on the sidelines and watch another one of your assets sold off to big business.

Need more examples of service decline? Fresh in the minds of Middle Keys residents recently is the temporary closure of the Key Colony Beach post office for lack of staff. Don't forget the permanent closure of the Sugarloaf post office too! If this isn't a decline in service, *what is?*

What the Postal Service wants to keep behind closed doors is the suspension of an employee who dared to confront local man-

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agement for the sake of her patrons. Like many of us, she was sick and tired of her customers getting the shaft by not receiving their mail on a timely basis. She indicated her intent to notify higher authorities. Consequently, she was ordered off the clock.

The supervisor's reason? She felt "threatened." Threatened? By what? We're not talking about physical violence here. The only "threat" she was feeling was the realization that someone was going to find out what a poor manger she was. Her textbook response was straight out of the Postal Manager's Handbook: *Kill the messenger!*

Does the word "threat" now have a new meaning for us as postal workers? Judging from that supervisor's perceived justification, I guess we are now free to apply that word to a broad range of postal situations. OK, class, let's use our new word in a sentence: Managers have no problem "*threatening*" employees whenever they want to move the mail quicker. How's *that* for a new meaning?

Ever notice when the shoe is on the other foot, the USPS suddenly hates the style? It's typical postal hypocrisy at its best and the kind of double standard that creates enormous employee stress and animosity. The reason behind that gag order now becomes clearer. The USPS cares not if its dirty laundry ever gets cleaned, just as long as it's put in an air tight hamper so no one can see it or smell it! Well, I'm taking the lid off the hamper now, so be prepared. Breathe deeply and take in the "fresh air".

When Ileana Ros-Lehtinen visited the Key West Post Office, she attempted to greet retail clerks behind the counter. Postmaster Benoit forbade her citing security reasons over postal funds! He essentially questioned the integrity of the Congresswoman by implying she was a thief! I suppose, as employees, we can't complain about not getting equal treatment in this case!

On Tax Day, April 15th, every postal employee in America rallies to serve and support the public. All post offices nationwide take extraordinary measures to insure all tax returns mailed before midnight receive that coveted postmark. For the past two years, however, Key West postmaster, Philip Benoit, has appointed himself judge and jury over public procrastination. Mr. Benoit decided a 9:30 PM deadline was sufficient for tax return cancellations and nixed the postmark-by-midnight tradition.

This month, the NALC launched an investigation when it discovered an alleged conspiracy among managers to falsify carriers' in-office times by illegally swiping employee time cards while they were still on the street. One supervisor admitted wrong-doing to union officials and indicated he was under the direction of postmaster Benoit to manipulate the numbers. The scam was made obvious when carrier "in" times did not match their vehicle cards.

In a past incident, a former Key West retail clerk had to contract a lawyer to forward a Worker's Compensation claim because the postmaster and a supervisor allegedly rewrote her claim to benefit the Postal Service, forged her signature and submitted it.

Now, what do you think the official USPS stance would be if one of those carriers was injured on the street when the "official" record showed them as being in the office?

What kind of meat grinder would that carrier go through in filing and proving a claim through Workman's Comp?

This incident should come as no surprise. Managers are always being caught falsifying delivery confirmation and express mail scans to prevent embarrassing failure reports. It seems the best way to "make the numbers" is to *make up the numbers!*

I've got to laugh cynically when I watch those training videos where that postal hostess robotically interviews district managers about how we're meeting delivery goals. It's more like watching the Emperor parade in his new clothes! After you personally witness all the lies and the cheating, it becomes obvious that all that bravado is nothing more than an elaborate façade . . . but don't ever proclaim that the Emperor really is naked! You'll be disciplined for uttering disparaging remarks!

You think I'm kidding? To give you an example of just what the word "disparaging" means to postal management, one Key West retail clerk was reprimanded for merely explaining to an agitated patron that his long wait in line was due to our short handedness! I guess the level of service has declined to such a point that simply telling the truth is now deemed "disparaging" by management.

On May 10, 2005, Mr. Benoit instructed all mail carriers to "do whatever it takes to be back in the post office by 5:00 PM." To a mail carrier, that's an instruction to curtail, a direct order to delay the mail. Why? Judging from the recent detention of a high profile postal manager for public drunkenness and being a danger to the community (how disparaging is that to postal image?), could it have meant that someone might have missed Happy Hour?

The USPS used to have a complaint form for retail clerks to give customers when they had a problem. It was a three-part form which required the Postal Service to respond back in writing. However, so many complaints were lodged, it was all management could do to keep up with the responses! One retail clerk in Key West was actually reprimanded for giving out too many!

Management's solution? Again, straight out of the Handbook: *Rescind the complaint form!* Customers now have to dial an 800 number and talk to a robot a thousand miles away! Problem solved with no more accountability to face!

It's just like the two British guys in the Guinness beer commercial: I've invented a way to reduce customer complaints! Reduce customer complaints by throwing away the forms? *Brilliant!*

Retail clerks have become front line soldiers fielding complaints from an agitated and militant public while managers cower under their desks. It's gotten so bad that we're literally under a gag order now! I am so alarmed by this paranoid, Stalinist style censorship that I was prompted to create my own policy for the retail counter. It reads:

NO COMPLAINTS TAKEN

AT THIS WINDOW

On May 4, 2005, Postmaster, Philip Benoit, individually admonished each employee in this office that disparaging remarks against the Postal Service while in

uniform will result in disciplinary action.

I am therefore unable to discuss your mail concerns with you lest my supervisor deem my choice of words disparaging. Since I cannot communicate with you truthfully and with clear conscience, I will be happy to refer you to a postal manager who can communicate with you without conscience.

When a customer approaches you with a problem, save yourself a lot of hassle. GET THE SUPERVISOR. And don't let them off the hook by letting them tell you, "Go tell the customer . . . blah, blah, blah." It's management who has created the problems. Let them face the music directly. You just stand there and smile. Try it. It's hysterical to watch. I always imagine Ralph Cramden (Jackie Gleason, *The Honeymooners*) whenever he got caught scamming and had to answer: "Hum-in-a, hum-in-a, hum-in-a!" It's classic!

Folks, we need to start paying attention to the neon warning signs of government complicity in the conspiracies of corporate greed. Once the Postal Service is dissolved and it becomes evident to the public that *this was a very bad idea*, do you think King George's men will put Humpty back together again? The answer is to hold postal management's feet to the fire *now*. Tell your friends and family what is going on (*off the clock, of course!*). Have them contact their representatives in Congress to demand accountability from the USPS.

After this article hits the press, and postal paranoia being what it is, I will surely need to seek whistleblower protection under federal statutes. It's plain to see how sensitive the USPS is when its skeletons are revealed and the ugly beast of its management culture exposed to public scrutiny. Now let's see how long it takes for Postal Inspectors to take me away like Saddam's Secret Police or how free speech fares under King George's reign in the post-9/11 era.

In his Gettysburg address, Abraham Lincoln sought to insure the Government Of the People, *For* the People and *By* the People would not perish from the earth. It's fading fast. Perhaps it's already gone. Since 1776, we've built a a safe fortress to protect our liberties. However, we must be vigilant not only against the enemy outside the walls, but the enemy within. Apathy is that enemy. Activism is our sentry. Be a part of it. Get involved. It's your duty as a citizen. Don't let our castle become a house of cards.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Check out the latest edition of the Postal Bulletin (June 23, 2005). It depicts Deputy PMG Patrick Donahoe swearing the oath of office with one hand on the Bible and the other hand raised to God. In light of the blatant misdeeds by management at the local level, I find this image to be very disconcerting and strikingly paradoxical. When official misconduct is so commonplace within my own office and practiced without impunity, one can't help but wonder what loathsome management policies are condoned at the top. Perhaps the joke's on us. Is that really the Holy Bible or just a copy of the DMM? Either way, it's just another façade for the public..

Jack's View

June 1st began the official hurricane season for South Florida and I have just now received a "revised copy" of the South Florida District Hurricane/Tropical Storm Procedure for 2005. The plan talks about a meeting that will be called if a hurricane threatens. The District Manager will then decide when to curtail operations and release employees "as warranted" except for us in the Keys.

We are supposed to believe that every Postmaster in the Keys, all seven of them, have the authority to "make their own determination as to when to suspend operations and ensure employee safety following local governmental instructions". Fat Chance!

District micromanages the Keys offices on every detail. Are we really supposed to believe those Postmasters now have the authority to suspend ops without being told they can or can not? Can they can tell South Florida Dispatch not to send the mail down the Keys? The assertion is absurd. This plan is the same as all the other plans. That is, NO PLAN!! *It's wait and see!*

Well, this is MY plan. Once NOAA declares a "hurricane warning" for the Keys, i.e. The storm is imminent within 24 hours, Jack is leaving work. If the warning is issued at 8:15 AM (my start time) and they don't curtail ops until 5:15 PM (my end tour), I don't have 24 hours to prepare and perhaps evacuate. I have 15 hours. Most of that is after the sun goes down and not enough time. Every one else in town is boarding up and I am boxing mail for people who are evacuating because my employer doesn't want to ensure my safety. There won't be

any revenue because businesses are closing. In essence, they are paying me to stay put, not generate revenue.

Last year during this same scenario, I raised a fuss and called Rick Suarez . He said although the service is not curtailing ops, if we feel in danger we may take annual leave or LWOP without being marked unscheduled. So, there it is folks! They know it's time to go but they just don't want to pay us admin leave to do it. Their concession for all our lobbying? We can go and they won't try to punish us like they did in the past. Ain't that grand?!!

So, this is my solution to management's refusal to make a plan and ensure our safety: *we will do it for them*. As soon as a hurricane warning is called by emergency management, if there is no Postal order to start securing the office and the mail with a definite release time, everyone put in a 3971 asking for admin leave and vacate the building.

Let the managers secure the building and mail, or not, as they like. Don't allow them to "wait and see" with your safety.

If the warning is issued before your start time, call in and ask for admin leave for community disaster. Later, if they have not noted it that way on your 3971, then change it. The 3971 is your request for leave. It is your slip. Fill it out your way. All they can do is deny it. They can't change it.

When the hurricane is passed and it is safe to return to work, either they will approve the admin leave or deny it. If the admin leave is denied, we will grieve it and fight for our rights to protect ourselves from imminent danger.

Once a hurricane warning is declared, if everyone who feels in danger immediately leaves the building, management WILL make a plan that includes our safety the next time. They have already said they will not discipline anyone for leaving who feels in danger. So, don't be afraid. Just go, take care of your house and your family. If the Hurricane Center says a killer storm is going to hit you within 24 hours, GET OUT OF THE WAY. Don't leave it up to management to safeguard you. They don't have a very good track record. Be Safe. Jack.

Next Union Meeting

Thursday, July 21, 2005

7:00 PM at Jack & Kathy's home

1217 Knowles Lane, Key West

Upon crossing the Cow Key Channel bridge into Key West, stay on US 1 (turn right). Turn left onto George St. immediately after Miami Subs. Turn right onto United St. (3 blocks). Park around 1035 United St. and walk down the lane.

Proposed Constitutional Changes

I doubt there are many members who will disagree with me when I mention the sacrifice of personal time union representatives voluntarily give to our cause. Although they receive monetary compensation, many members may not be aware that union LWOP results in a loss of USPS matching funds to the rep's 401K (Thrift Savings) plan. This is a sacrifice our union officials should not bear. The proposed Constitutional change reads:

Article 7, Section 3 - Officers and Their Duties

Section 2 - Executive Board

add section G

Approve the voluntary participation for officers, stewards and delegates in the National APWU 401K retirement

plan. The plan will provide for matching funds at the same level the member currently has in the USPS plan, up to 5% and up to a 40 hour week, while performing official union duties in a non-pay status from the USPS.

Section 3.C - Secretary/Treasurer

add section 9

Administer local application of National APWU 401K retirement plan.

The Constitution calls for changes to be first proposed in a scheduled meeting, subsequently printed in the newsletter and ratified at the next scheduled meeting. This change was proposed at the last meeting held at Jack and Kathryn's house on April 22, 2005.

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**Keys
Breeze**

**AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION
FLORIDA KEYS AREA LOCAL**

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<i>Vice President</i>	<i>Kathryn dePoo</i>
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