

Postal hunger strike gains support

Written by

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Image: Nannette Corley, president of the Montgomery County, Maryland area local of the American Postal Workers Union, will be one of the hunger strikers June 25-28

Ten protesters are staging a hunger strike at postal headquarters and in the halls of Congress beginning June 25. The ten are denouncing massive job and service cuts threatened by the US Postal Service.

Among the latest to join the protesters is Nannette Corley, president of the Montgomery County, Maryland area local of the American Postal Workers Union and the first Black female hunger striker. Corley joins a list of Black community leaders who are supporting the strike, including Mack Julion, president of the nation's second largest letter carriers union local; and Bill Fletcher, former director of TransAfrica and regular columnist in the African American press. The Chicago area NAACP (Southside) and Coalition of Black Trade Unionists are also on board.

Al Sharpton's National Action Network Youth Move has endorsed the hunger strike protest. "To Congress that are deciding on the postal issues, we are tracking your yays and nays. Come election day we will remind the voters on whether you were instrumental in saving jobs or

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responsible for the loss of jobs," warned Victoria Panell, youth leader of NAN. "Take away a parent's job, take away a child's future." Twenty-one percent of postal jobs are held by African Americans. The postal service is the largest employer of Black workers making over \$55,000 annually.

Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe has announced that he will begin closure of half the mail sorting plants in the country, cut hours from 25 to 75 percent in half the nation's post offices, downgrade delivery standards and eliminate tens of thousands of jobs. Hunger strikers claim that a 2006 Congressional mandate, which forces the US Postal Service to prefund retiree health benefits 75 years in advance, is responsible for the financial crisis facing the service. Without the mandate, postal revenues came close to matching expenses over the past six years. The USPS has also overpaid tens of billions into two pension funds.



The hunger strikers are calling on Donahoe to maintain delivery standards and suspend cuts and closures while allowing Congress to fix the finances by repealing the prefunding mandate and refunding a pension surplus.

Image: National Action Network Youth, with Victoria Panell, protest at a post office in Harlem, N.Y.

"Not the internet, not private competition, not the recession – Congress is responsible for the postal debt," said Jamie Partridge, a retired letter carrier traveling from Portland, Oregon for the hunger strike. "Corporate interests, working through their friends in Congress, want to

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undermine the USPS, bust the unions then privatize it."

"We will not stand by as our beloved postal service is destroyed," said Tom Dodge, a hunger striker and postal worker from Baltimore. "We will shame Congress and denounce the Postmaster General. We will engage in dramatic actions on Capitol Hill and at the USPS Headquarters to turn up the heat on decision makers."

Sympathetic hunger strikes and other local protest actions are being organized by Communities and Postal Workers United, a national grassroots network.