

STOP CONTRACTING OUT— JOIN THE PICKET LINE MARCH 15!

by Peter Shapiro, Editor

When Branch President L.C. Hansen attended our union's National Rap Session in Los Angeles January 28, she heard a disturbing presentation from President Bill Young on USPS plans to contract out city delivery work.

Returning home, she found a certified letter from Beaverton Postmaster John Lee on her desk, advising her of management's intention to take bids from private contractors for 374 new delivery points in the Arbor Parc development off Laidlaw Road.

There have been scattered instances of city deliveries being contracted out across the country in the past few years. It was the major sticking point in our national contract negotiations. But this is the first time it has happened here.

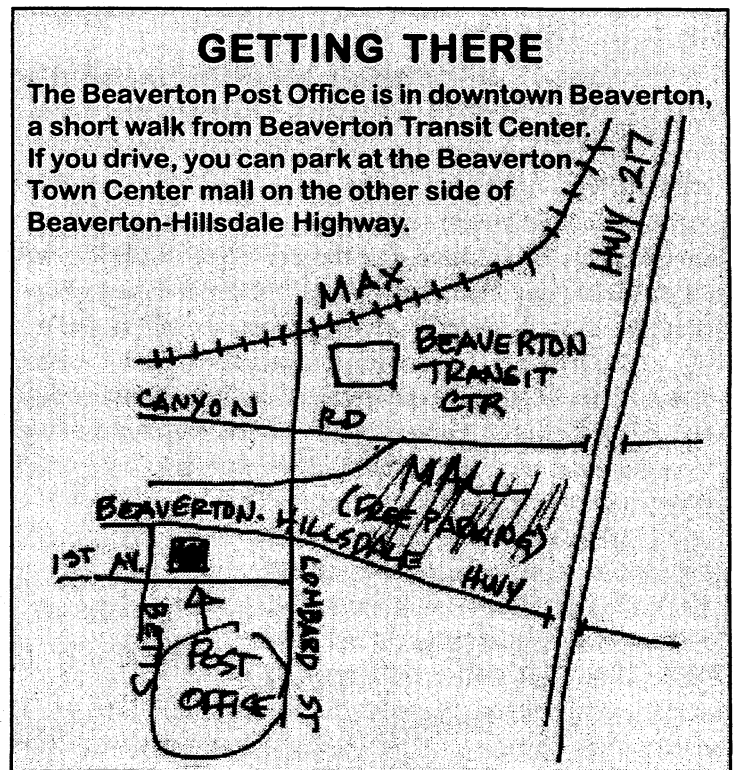
Management has placed a freeze on authorization of new delivery points in the Portland district. Carriers are being directed to update and turn in their EDIT books now. The data is being forwarded to the USPS Regional Office in Denver, which will decide which new deliveries will be farmed out and which will be handled in-houses. As many as 15,000 new delivery points are expected to open up inside the Portland urban growth boundary over the next few years, and apparently management considers all of them fair game.

Management has thrown down the gauntlet. We have no choice but to respond in kind. At our February Branch Meeting, the members voted unanimously to throw up an **informational picket line at the Beaverton Post Office after work on Thursday, March 15.**

Besides protesting this attack on our job security, the picket will alert the general public to what amounts to an abdication by the USPS of its long-established legal mandate to provide universal mail service. This mandate was reaffirmed by Congress late last year with the passage of the Postal Enhancement and Accountability Act (postal reform). By mobilizing public opinion as well as our membership, we intend to hold management accountable and make sure it abides by its mandate.

At the national level, the NALC is fighting for strong language against contracting out in our new national agreement. At the same time, it is urging Congress to put pressure on the Postal Board of Governors to stop outsourcing our jobs, while crafting future legislation to explicitly forbid it. The national union is counting on a favorable response from what is expected to be a labor-friendly Congress.

But it's always easier for our elected representatives to do the right thing when they have an aroused constituency backing them up. That's where we come in. Our customers value our work, and we try to do it well. Our daily contact with the public is our greatest asset as we alert the



community to the enormous threat to service standards, to say nothing of the privacy and security of the mail, posed by the contracting out of city deliveries.

We can already see some of the results. In Florida, deliveries to a new shopping mall are being handled by a private contractor whose criminal record would prevent him from working directly for the USPS. Outside Seattle, a gated retirement community is being served by a local ceramicist who earns a few extra bucks driving a sack full of mail ten miles from the local post office and leaving it in a CBU at the gate. Accountables and oversize parcels are left behind at the post office for customers to pick up. In Tacoma, excess sections of overburdened routes are being contracted out when the routes are adjusted.

Here in Portland, mail service to customers moving into new \$400,000 condominiums near Orenco Station remains in limbo while management prepares to contract it out. The customers must travel across town to the Hillsboro DCU to get their mail, while half a block away postal employees make regular deliveries. At this writing, a large priority parcel with a delivery confirmation bar code for one of the new addresses had been sitting on the supervisor's desk for nearly two weeks. We haven't been authorized by the USPS Western Region to deliver it.

Brothers and sisters, this is not merely union-busting; it's rotten business practice.

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BEAVERTON PICKET

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In defending its actions, management is sure to point out that the Post Office has a long history of using private contractors to make deliveries to isolated rural addresses. These Highway Contract Routes, as they're called, account for roughly 65,000 individual deliveries in Oregon.

But there are no practical or logistical reasons why the USPS can't deliver mail to an upscale new development in suburban Beaverton—except management's desire to get out of paying union wages and benefits.

The USPS has apparently been seduced by the example of a certain discount retail chain which became the nation's wealthiest business by employing a largely part-time work force for poverty wages and no benefits.

But the Postal Service isn't WalMart. Trying to run it that way is a sure way to destroy it—a betrayal of the American people as well as those who move the mail.

It falls to us to save this organization from itself. Be at the Beaverton post office at 4:30 on March 15, or as soon after that time as you can get there. Bring your family and friends. The union will do all it can to see that your customers know what we're doing and why, and understand that, to keep the Postal Service from being auctioned off to the lowest bidder, we need their help too.