

APWU NEWSservice

WILLIAM BURRUS, President ROY BRAUNSTEIN, Editor

1300 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20005
Volume 32 No. 23 • Dec. 20, 2002

American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO

Members Approve Contract Extension

The tentative agreement to extend by two years the 2000-2003 Collective Bargaining Agreement was ratified by APWU members by a vote of 79,932 to 10,568. The National Agreement now expires Nov. 20, 2005.

The biggest accomplishment, according to APWU President William Burrus, is stability. "Every time you enter negotiations," Burrus said, "management proposes to eliminate such things as cost-of-living adjustments and no-lay-off provisions, and reducing the contributions to employee health plans. These have been preserved, which in effect improves what we have to work with. I'm confident that securing key benefits for two additional years was important to the membership, and I'm satisfied that the referendum was a vote for job security."

One immediate effect of the extension is a moratorium on excessing and the reassignment of employees. Through May 15, there will be no reassignments of any employee to a work site more than 50 miles from that employee's permanent duty station.

Another effect is on the cost-of-living clause. With the contract extended, the fourth—and final—COLA increase under the 2000-2003 contract now becomes the fourth in a series of eight uninterrupted six-month COLA adjustments. This means members will receive the six-month COLA increase that accrues between August 2003 (after the final COLA measuring period of the 2000 agreement) and January 2004 (two months into the contract extension). These most likely would have been lost if negotiations, set to begin this summer, had gone on schedule.

"The extension gives us time to focus on issues that are important to members, especially in light of President Bush's appointment of a special commission that threatens to completely reshape the Postal Service as we know it," Burrus said. "Our members remain very concerned about the future."

"Management has promised to provide the union with a list of facilities slated for consolidation by the end of this year. In the meantime, we have a moratorium through May 15 on excessing employees beyond 50 miles. Management is required to petition the Office of Personnel Management for permission to offer all APWU-covered workers early retirement opportunities.

"The moratorium on excessing and the opportunities for

early-outs," Burrus said, "are important protections against the effects of plant closings."

The 13 members of the APWU Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee, called to Washington Nov. 13, unanimously endorsed the extension and recommended it be sent to the union's highest governing body, the membership.

"I'm gratified that it passed by a large amount," said Terry Grant, chairman of the Rank and File committee. "I think the members realized the wisdom of ratifying a contract now rather than going into negotiations next summer in what looks to be an unfavorable environment."

Grant, president of the Ohio Postal Workers, said, "This definitely benefits the members of the APWU. It protects COLA for another couple of years. Obviously, the pay raises don't look great, but these are very difficult times."

"This gives our organization a chance to turn its attention to other things," Grant said. "At every level we can focus on grievances and the grievance procedure itself, postal attendance terrorism, excessing ... there are plenty of challenges and contract stability can only help us."

Ballots were mailed to members beginning on Dec. 2, with returns targeted to a single post office box in Washington. Members of the Rank and File committee picked up the envelopes at 2 p.m. (E.S.T.) Dec. 19, and the count began immediately.

The unofficial results were posted on the APWU Website home page (www.apwu.org) shortly after the nationwide count was concluded at about 9:30 p.m.

A local-by-local count will take several days to tabulate and will be online soon after the first of the year. All other contract-extension details also will be posted on the Web site.

The agreed-upon extension is the first of its kind in APWU's 32-year history. Had the extension not been ratified, full-scale negotiations would have begun in August.

"The extended agreement doesn't begin to meet all of our members' goals," Burrus said. "But I believe that it is in the best interest of all APWU members, and I believe this was the best time to get it done."

Timeline of the 2003-2005 Agreement

Dec. 18, 2001: Arbitrator Stephen B. Goldberg rules on the 2000-2003 contract. The agreement is set to expire Nov. 20, 2003.

Oct. 9, 2002: APWU President William Burrus meets with USPS officials to discuss minimizing the effects of excessing on union members. They discuss the possibility of extending the 2000 Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Oct. 9: President Burrus meets with APWU's top officers to discuss the possibility of a contract extension. He asks them not to make an immediate decision, but to consider the idea.

Oct. 21: The top officers of the APWU agree unanimously to explore the possibility of a contract extension in an effort to advance some of the union's long-term goals.

Oct. 28: President Burrus makes a presentation to the APWU National Presidents' Conference and the National Executive Council about the possible extension and discusses with APWU leaders the "bottom-line issues" that he believes must be included in any agreement.

Oct. 30: Formal discussions with USPS begin.

Nov. 7: Rank and File Bargaining Advisory Committee members are appointed.

Nov. 12: President Burrus announces that a tentative agreement has been reached.

Nov. 13: The Rank and File committee convenes in Washington, DC, to consider the tentative agreement.

Nov. 14: President Burrus holds teleconferences with the presidents of APWU locals and state organizations and with the National Executive Council to discuss the terms of the tentative agreement.

Nov. 14: The Rank and File Committee "unanimously endorses the extension and recommends it be sent to the union's highest governing body, the membership, for final decision."

Nov. 19: The APWU National Executive Board votes unanimously to endorse the tentative agreement to extend the contract.

Dec. 2-4: Ballots, due back Dec. 19, are mailed to APWU members.

Dec. 19: Votes are counted and the results announced: 79,932 in favor, 10,568 against.