

Dear Postal Fraction member,

Hi! This is the first mailing from the new National Postal Fraction. The National Fraction Steering Committee will be based here in Oakland. It will consist of Pat M., Paul R. and myself, David D. here, and Cal W. in Detroit. We'll be meeting here as a steering committee once every 2 weeks, alternating with meetings about our local Post Office work. I will be National Fraction Administrator, which means I'll be co-ordinating fraction correspondence, bulletins, etc.

Until now, all the co-ordination and direction of our national postal work has been done by one (overworked) person, with help from a few other people in other cities. This has, not surprisingly, meant that a lot of the co-ordination and political leadership that a national fraction should give didn't happen. We intend to correct this situation. We can't do it instantly, we certainly can't do it without your help, but we will do it.

To give some idea what we have in mind, I'll outline the things I think the national fraction should be able to do. It should give a political lead to all our work in the Post Office. This means putting together an over all picture of our work, working out a strategy for developing it, and making sure our resources are focused around that strategy. We'll try, through the fraction bulletin, to initiate discussions in all the fractions about the political questions we need to deal with. Political leadership also means we should be able to give local fractions help on how to focus their resources, what other fractions have done in similar situations, etc.

Second, the national fraction should co-ordinate our work. This means making sure information travels between fractions. It means co-ordinating travellers, so that the right person comes to talk to your contact. It means planning for national fraction meetings, and for national projects, like our intervention at the NALC convention.

Lastly, the national fraction should provide back-up for local fractions. We'll co-ordinate Post Office coverage in workers' Power. We'll try to do research, on the law, or the NLRB, or the BUC's, or union structure, that local fractions need-- or we'll find someone else who can. We'll help new fractions get off the ground, and help branches with postal contacts, but no fraction yet. We'll try to produce useful materials, like leaflets about workers' Power aimed at postal workers, and eventually another postal pamphlet.

O.K., so how are we going to do all this? We have three areas that we'll start on in the next few months. We'll try to put together two information packets-- one an introduction to USPS, the unions, and our fraction, the other a workers' Power packet, with mock-up leaflets, suggestions for selling, etc.

We'll try, as a national steering committee to really get to know the fraction-- to talk with all of you, get your feedback on what we want to do, hear what your problems are, we'll have a discussion of each local fraction's situation, so that we can be of real assistance to individual fractions. This all depends on your input-- if you don't send us reports, we'll have nothing to go by.

We'll start putting out regular national fraction bulletins. These will contain reports from each local fraction, National Steering Committee minutes, background information on the Post Office, and political discussion articles (some ideas for these we tossed around are the Sombrotto campaign and our attitude toward it, and the right to strike, how to win it.) We need your input on this bulletin-- what do you want in it? What background information would be useful? What political discussions would be useful? We'd also like to send out with the bulletin copies of rank-and-file newsletters people are working on, leaflets they put out, etc.

This mailing isn't really a fraction bulletin yet, but I hope it'll start the ball rolling. We're including reports on our recent convention interventions and National Steering Comm. minutes along with this letter

And now, the ball being rolling, it's your turn to roll it back. I want to put out fraction bulletin #1 the first week in October. I NEED LOCAL FRACTION REPORTS TO BE IN BY FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 24. These should be typed single-spaced on 8 1/2 x 11 mimeograph stencils (Gestetner stencils if possible) They should include who's in the fraction, what you're doing, what your problems are, who your contacts are. The name of our group should not be mentioned, nor should people's last names, for security reasons. If you can, send 60 copies of any newsletter you work on, leaflet you put out, etc. You could also send a note with your ideas for what should be in the bulletin. PLEASE SEND US A REPORT, EVEN IF IT'S SMALL, AND PLEASE SEND IT SO IT GETS TO US BY THE 24TH. If you have questions, or if there are problems with this, let me know by writing (c/o the Bay Area branch, PO Box 132, Oakland, CA. 94604) or calling (415-652-1189, best bet is 6 pm or 11 pm my time)

For Postal Workers' Power,

David

NATIONAL FRACTION STEERING COMMITTEE MINUTES

AUGUST 31

We discussed the next issue of the Postal Worker, set up a tentative production schedule, and worked on how to involve more non-IS postal workers in actually producing the paper.

David made a presentation on initial steps for building the national fraction. (these are outlined in the accompanying letter, so I won't repeat them here) We discussed these proposals, particularly the fraction bulletin, and set up a date for putting out the next bulletin.

Paul spoke on the situation in Seattle. We agreed that we would contact the organizer on the state of the fraction, and would invite Al to come to the Bay Area in the near future.

Pat spoke on the situation in L.A. We agreed that we would talk to the new L.A. organizer about finding someone to co-ordinate work with our postal contacts.

We also briefly discussed the situation in Springfield, MA. We agreed that two people from Boston should be asked to meet with our contact in Springfield.

David

MAILHANDLERS CONVENTION REPORT

PAT M.

The convention was attended almost entirely by local officers, with the exception of some stewards here and there. Ed from the Philly bulk was the only other r&f militant I knew there and any others I could only find by getting into discussions about grievances, conditions, etc. That took some time, sorting out those only interested in talking to a woman, and those who were fairly militant but who did not necessarily think "rank & file first"

I was not open with the Rank & File Postal Worker, deciding instead to use the time checking people out and getting addresses of militants to whom I could later send the paper and get their reaction.

It was a small convention, 150 delegates representing some 30,000 mailhandlers. As the only white woman mailhandler there I was rather conspicuous. So I mostly observed, took notes and gleaned any information I could. I soon gained a reputation of being a more active observer than some of the delegates and some started depending on my notes for their information.

I have some notes on compensation and a more complete list of resolutions, etc. If people feel they want a fuller report on the convention than what goes in the Postal Worker, I can write it. Let me know.

At the NALC convention in Houston in mid-August, fraction members helped organize a rank and file convention caucus. This report will evaluate that work and attempt to draw out some conclusions. For background on what happened at the convention, see WP # 171 and 172.

Overall, the rank and file caucus did a successful piece of organizing at the convention. A core of a half dozen delegates were thoroughly committed to the caucus throughout the convention. The caucus met every night, attracting ten to fifteen people to each meeting. It discussed resolutions, the Sombrotto campaign, and what floor tactics to use. All told, about thirty delegates attended the caucus meetings. The caucus was recognized as a legitimate group at the convention. It was a pole of attraction for militant delegates. What little red-baiting was attempted proved to be ineffective.

The presence of our fraction within the caucus was low-keyed but understood and accepted. All of the core delegates knew of our role in building the caucus. Although as an organization we had no organized presence there, such as newspaper sales, we were able to introduce a number of delegates to our politics.

Here are some general conclusions:

1) Advance work was important. A lot of initial groundwork and correspondence for the caucus was done weeks in advance. The R&F Postal Worker played a key role in bringing together the initial core of carriers to organize the caucus. Advance preparation allowed the caucus to get right down to business the first day of the convention.

2) Flexibility is key. The caucus had prepared resolutions on Kokomo and other issues. Some had to be dropped and other issues picked up, depending on the mood of the delegates and the objective circumstances. While the caucus didn't significantly effect the vote on any issues, our speakers helped to set a tone for debates on the president's salary and others. The caucus did a good job of choosing the key issues and speaking from the floor on them.

3) One-on-one organizing is essential. This was one of their major weaknesses. Most caucus members were inexperienced and didn't have the confidence to walk up to any delegate and talk about the caucus and its program. The caucus could have been much broader if this had been done well.

4) The politics of the R&F Postal Worker fit the mood of the militant convention delegates exactly. The idea of "critical support" for Sombrotto was right on target, as all militants supported him but saw the need to keep organizing independently now and after the election as well. The view that the Sombrotto campaign is crucial for the future of the union was confirmed by the convention. A whole layer of second-level officials more militant than Sombrotto (Bob Funge from Portland, for example) were unwilling to jump into a strike movement today, even though they feel a strike is necessary. "Why stike under Rademacher and get our heads chopped off when Sombrotto is just around the corner" was the underlying attitude. Sombrotto, while he won't lead a fight against management, raises expectations and leads people to think that at least he won't crack down hard on a strike movement.

5) A national organizing effort, like this one, was well worth the time and effort, even for the young and inexperienced postal rank and file movement. It gave the caucus members invaluable experience in dealing with union forces and issues on a national level. We are now better prepared for the national issues coming up, such as the 1978 contract fight.