

2010 - The Year For APWU's "Prefect Storm"

By: John H. Dirzius, Regional Coordinator, Northeast Region

If you remember the movie the "Prefect Storm" you will recall that a number of unique events all occurring at the same time resulted in disaster for the fishermen aboard the vessel the *Andrea Gail*. It proved to be an exciting movie, but as we all know George Clooney is not lost at sea forever, he's starring in a new movie. Wikipedia defines the "prefect storm" as an event where a rare combination of circumstances will aggravate a situation drastically.

It would appear that APWU will confront its very own prefect storm this year and while we won't get lost at sea it will be an extremely exciting and challenging time for all of us. Internally APWU will conduct its election of national officers, host its national convention, and enter into contract negotiations with postal management.

Additionally, APWU will continue its struggle to stop the closing of postal stations, the consolidation of postal facilities, the elimination of postal facilities, and massive excessing impacting many of our members and all of our crafts. On the legislative front the APWU will be fighting management's efforts for 5 day delivery, postal discounts, the multi billion dollar pre-funding of future retiree's health costs, and the over funding of the retirement system to the tune of \$75 billion dollars! There is little doubt that the events APWU will confront in 2010 will make this year our "prefect storm"! However, unlike watching a movie none of us can sit back with a soft drink and some buttered popcorn and merely let these events occur without our collective involvement. If we all just sit back and watch the events unfold without our full involvement our future and the fate of the men aboard the *Andrea Gail* will be the same!

As everyone knows APWU President William Burrus will be retiring at the end of his term this November. President Burrus has served this union with distinction and honor for over 50 years. His achievements are reflected in the current standard of living enjoyed by every APWU member and every postal employee. With Bill's departure a new national President will be elected. This election will also see a number of new faces as other officers will retire as well and some familiar faces will be running for new positions. Elections in any organization are not a spectator sport. It demands the active involvement and participation of everyone. Elections are the foundation of any democratic labor union. Each member is directly involved in choosing its national union leadership. Every member will receive a ballot and has an obligation and duty to vote. In most situations our members need to do nothing more than bring their ballot envelope to work and drop it in the mail system. I encourage every member to be an active participant in this year's APWU national elections and have a direct voice in selecting your national union leadership for the next 3 years.

In August APWU will host its National Convention to conduct the business of the union. The delegates convened will fully participate in setting the direction of the union both internally as well as in the collective bargaining process. This convention will take place on the heels of the start of contract negotiations. The delegates will have a voice in the collective bargaining process as they debate contract proposals and set contract priorities.

There are never any easy contract negotiations and these negotiations will be no different. Each of you is familiar with the issues that confront us in these difficult negotiations. An historic decline in mail volumes, budget deficits, increase in health benefit costs, facility re-design, re-directing the workforce, excessing, a slow recovering economy in addition to the many day to day contractual provisions our members enjoy will all be on the table and in play. Contract negotiations are the union's most important job and APWU takes that responsibility very seriously. APWU has been preparing for these negotiations since last year. Our efforts and hard work will continue until we reach a fair and decent contract for our members or until we reach impasse. If we reach impasse then it will be on to arbitration. If you have any suggestions for this upcoming negotiations please forward them to: negotiations@apwu.org or by mail to Greg Bell, Industrial Relations Director, APWU Negotiations 2010, 1300 L St NW Washington, DC 20005.

On the legislative front APWU will again be in the forefront of protecting the rights and benefits of not only our members, but for all working Americans. Your continued support of COPA in 2010 cannot be under estimated. Your continued support plays a direct role in establishing and maintaining a strong relationship with Congressional representatives to ensure that APWU continues to be a major player and has a leading role in every piece of postal legislation affecting and impacting our members. None of this is possible without your direct support of APWU-COPA.

It would appear from the recent statements and action of postal management that they will aggressively pursue the issue of 5-day delivery in the upcoming months. It appears their target for implementation would be sometime in 2011. This will become a major legislative fight for every postal labor union and our collective memberships. This will be a collective struggle, similar to the issue of closing postal stations and will require the involvement and support of the American public and our loyal customers.

In addition to our battle to preserve our industry and our jobs, the issue of pre-funding future retiree's health benefits is still not resolved and will require additional action in the immediate future. Last year Congress passed legislation that allowed the USPS to make a one time reduced payment to the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund for future retiree health benefits. Rather than pay the scheduled \$5.4 billion payment the new legislation allowed the USPS to pay only \$1.4 billion by September 30, 2009.

Most recently the Office of the Inspector General has reported that the USPS has been overcharged \$75 billion in contributions to the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) pension fund. After an in-depth investigation, the OIG has concluded that an inequitable system for computing the Postal Service's CSRS pension responsibility has caused the dramatic overpayment. This newest overfunding debacle, if corrected, would more than offset the Postal Service's deficit from fiscal year 2009 and the expected shortfalls in FY 2010 and 2011.

However, the real question is will the USPS see any of this money returned to its coffers? Since the overpayment was paid to the US Treasury it has, most likely already been spent and will require some kind of legislation to have any of it returned to the USPS.

As recently stated by President Burrus, *"This report is good news for a beleaguered government service. USPS service standards and productivity have remained at high levels; the economy is recovering, and the black cloud of fiscal insolvency could be removed. All parties in the postal community who wish to be of assistance must join in an effort to correct the inequity and relieve the Postal Service of the unjustified funding requirement."* Hopefully these two important issues will be resolved prior to contract negotiations.

As you can see, it is time to put the soft drink down, put the popcorn away, put your shoes back on, get out of the chair and get involved! Your job, your standard of living, and your future are all in play. Don't sit back and watch the end of the movie as I can assure you the ending is very scary without everyone's total commitment, energy, and involvement.