

Eleanor G. Bailey calls out to postal workers, unionists & their communities:

UNITED IS THE WAY!

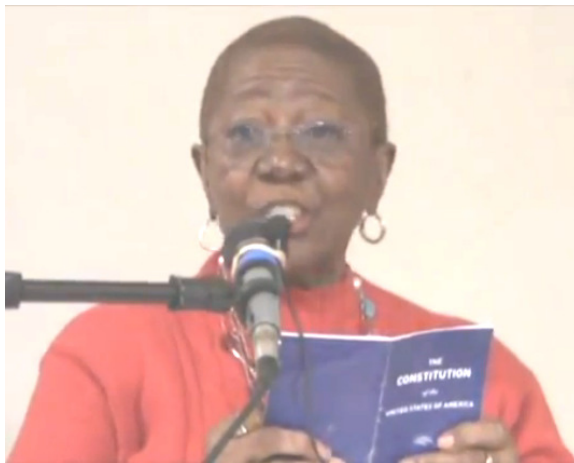
A leader of postal worker retirees, a founder of Post Office Women for Equal Rights – POWER – and a legendary figure in the 1970 postal strike which won collective bargaining for postal workers, Eleanor G. Bailey is attending the Workers Assembly in Charlotte, NC, that convenes at the same time as the Democratic National Convention. In the fall of 2011, Ms. Bailey led a successful campaign to stop the shut-down of two postal stations in Coop City in the northeast Bronx: home to 30,000 retirees, including many postal retirees. In August 2012, Ms. Bailey attended a “2nd Bill of Rights” convention in Philadelphia. (See below.) She issued the following statement to postal workers, and the entire labor movement, on the eve of the conventions:

We must get together! We’ve got to put down our individualism. We need to get in line with the rest of the labor movement who have found out that their strength is in **one thing**. Because Congress – people need to know — Congress “gave” us what we have and Postmaster General Donahoe is demanding that Congress eliminate the right to collective bargaining. They will take it away unless we present a **united front**: they’ll take away everything we worked for, especially the right to collective bargaining. This is under attack, and the rest of the [postal] unions have not had any contract negotiations. So our thing needs to be: **united is the way!**

I’ve always been concerned that the Carriers, Mail Handlers, Rural Carriers and Clerks have never merged – management has played us against each other. If we were together management couldn’t do this. We need to make this happen now.

After the 1970 strike was over, our five little union organizations got together and demanded the right to collective bargaining. The U.S. government decided just one would have collective bargaining. Our union merged with four other “fraternities” to become the National Postal Union (NPU), and then the Motor Vehicle and Maintenance Crafts joined. That’s when we became APWU. (NPU was all of them together.)

I think Charlotte could be a wake-up call for all of us there.



We’ll have an opportunity to meet and talk, exchange ideas, because no one person has the know-it-all as to how to do this thing. Maybe when we leave we’ll have bits & pieces to put together when we get back.

Leadership needs to be in tune with the membership

The labor movement has stagnated because those who are in power are not in tune with what their co-workers or members are really about. I don’t think they really have

informed their membership of what it took for them to get to the benefits they have now.

I have noticed that some of the folks who came into the Post Office in the last 10 –15 years do not realize what was done for them to have their benefits. When I came into the Post Office in 1965, my salary was \$3,000 per year. That was after taking a 4-hour entrance test, of reading, writing, arithmetic, plus composition. We had a battle to eliminate that test, and APWU won a change to a more reasonable test.

I came in in the mid-Sixties, right after President Kennedy signed equal pay for equal work, because women weren’t making the same salary as men. There were two lists: one for women and one for men. The only way women could get in is if a male relative in the Post Office passed away. We had to be able to do the heavy work, and also became carriers. Today there’s more women than men. We were taking the test and passing it.

After we got collective bargaining, we sisters had to fight our own battles in the postal unions. **Post Office Women for Equal Rights – POWER** – was born of our determination to be part of the leadership ourselves. We had to do this to get equal rights, and now we’re part of the APWU Constitution but there’s still some men who want to get rid of it, saying it’s not necessary, but we’re not equal yet.

Women had to deal with a lot of male resistance to coming into the Post Office. They didn’t even allow us into the lunch room. They kept us separate from the men. They actually had a rope to separate us – every day that rope got moved. Many men had common sense!

A Second Bill of Rights:

On August 11 in Philadelphia, under the banner of Workers Stand for America, a 2nd Bill of Rights was created. Its goal was to re-direct the debate in the upcoming election to what average Americans really need:

1. The right to full employment and a living wage.
2. The right to full participation in the electoral process.
3. The right to a voice at work.
4. The right to a quality education.
5. The right to a secure, healthy future.

I give credit to Moe Biller (Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union president in the 1960s and '70s, and national president in the early 1990s) for the fore-sight that women were going to be a major part of the Postal Service. He actually courted us, and wanted us to be more involved. I went to him and the staff because I was pissed since women were getting fired too quickly. Most women had to work midnights – we were the last hired – and could not get childcare for those hours. I felt the union wasn't doing anything to help us or make things better. Because I fought over this, they made me an "appointed officer" to "cure the problem," but to this day the problem is not "cured." We women in the Sixties joined the union in droves, because we recognized that we needed the union's protection.

Moe Biller knew that for us to be involved we needed to learn how to be active, productive union members. He actually got us set up with the Labor College, so we could learn history, parliamentary procedure, how to be involved in a union meeting – all of these things. He helped us be part of a very viral New York City group of labor union women. We were the beginning of **Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)**. Being involved in the startup of national CLUW was thrilling – being among union women who realized we all had the same problem. That was the most fabulous thing in the world.

I say to labor union women: you need to get yourselves together. Women, join the brothers, it is time to go back to action. You've got to fight for what you want. You can't just wait for someone else to do it. You've got to do it yourselves! Now is the time – they're about to take everything unions have gained, everything we have, and give it to private industry.

I feel **IT'S TIME FOR ALL UNIONS TO BACK EACH OTHER!** This is not the time for individual unions to attempt to do things in the old way: to fight alone to stave off what's happening to each of them. It's time to show a **total togetherness**. It's time to support each other.

What we need to look at is what Congress is doing – because this is where we put the blame. They're saying less government, but the government should be there as a vehicle to better things. They talk about cutting back, but how do you do that and create jobs? Where are they going to create jobs for 200 – 300,000 postal workers and other public employees who lose their jobs?

We've got to learn to communicate with each other. We've got to stop and listen to each other so that we can make a united decision on which way to protect our livelihoods, and our futures. Because **we can't allow the labor movement to be destroyed!** We've got to make our members understand that the union is there for their protection and the protection can only come from a united labor movement.

I feel our leadership needs to go back to the floor, back to where they came from. They need to find out what's bugging people. They must do outreach to newer

workers. The new workers need to know they are needed. You've got to make people know they're needed. In New York Metro's last election, the new administration won because they went to the membership, individually and in groups. The membership wants to see and know who's in charge. They want to say "I know her/him..."

The 1970 Postal Strike

In 1970, the members were ready before the officers to go on strike. The carriers actually started it, and we backed them. One of the carrier shop stewards on the midnight shift at the NYC GPO where I worked came to me and said, Bailey, I think we're going on strike. He said "would you guys support us?" I said, "Definitely, but I have to talk to my folks." Fortunately I had excellent relationships with the folks on my tour.

I was scared, because we were going on strike against the U.S. government, and at that time we were subject to Taft Hartley and had no [legal] right to go on strike. (They almost put our president, Mo Biller, in jail because he defied Taft Hartley.)

I had to be out there at night to keep my folks from going in the building. They said as long as I was out there they would not cross the picket line. We had a bar in the middle of the block that was our first headquarters. Some of our people spent the night in that bar!

One of the main reasons for the strike was that we got tired of going to Congress and begging for money. I remember once we bought a 100-pound bag of peanuts. We always went to Congress to beg for the percentage raise. That time we took peanuts with us and gave them to our congressional reps, to let them know what we thought of their pitiful raises.

We need to highlight the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. It's the best run health program in the world. All congressional, federal and postal employees are in it. Now the Postmaster and rightwingers in Congress want to take us out of this plan. Both active and retired postal workers need to understand that this is another thing that's under threat. You need to understand Congress is about to take away all the benefits we have won!

For more from Eleanor G. Bailey, browse to:
<http://clupjs.com/2012/03/18/eleanor-bailey-retired-postal-worker-labor-activist-peoples-power-tour-sunday-march-112012/>

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