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First and foremost, I would like to thank our hardworking TWU 555 members in MDW who have done their very best, under the most horrendous weather and operational conditions, to serve our customers. I would also like to thank those members who volunteered for temporary assignments to assist in MDW.

Many of the factors that contributed to our problems on the ramp could have been prevented but were ignored, such as staffing. On January 4, 2014, the company’s staffing chart showed a shortage of 28 ramp agents prior to the storm. I know many members were exhausted from excessive mandatory overtime during the holiday season. This type of understaffing is not uncommon, and in MDW the most recent shortage goes back to midsummer 2013. Lack of safe operating ground equipment also negatively impacted an already difficult situation.

It was particularly disturbing to learn that some Southwest leaders criticized ramp agents for exercising their right to take the ten hour rest after mandatory overtime and threaten discipline up to termination for attendance. The finger-pointing that occurred after the meltdown solved nothing. As you know, TWU Local 555 filed a lawsuit to protect our MDW members and to defend the language in our contract that protects all 555 members. As this newsletter is going to print, we are awaiting a decision from a Federal Judge on the whether the issue is a major dispute under the Railway Labor Act. Protecting our members’ rights is always the primary goal of TWU Local 555 and group grievances have also been filed on this matter.

Due to the operational failure in MDW, as your president, I met personally with Gary Kelly to discuss all of the contributing factors. We all know that our airline can do better, and frankly, what occurred in MDW was an embarrassment. There were factors outside of ground operations, such as crew scheduling, that also contributed. Interviews with our members indicated that 555 members were not just concerned with their significant personal sacrifices, but there was a genuine concern about our customers and the inconvenience they experienced due to the meltdown.

As a 31 year Southwest Airlines employee, it is my honor to serve you, and I am proud of the work you do everyday to keep our airline successful. It is your commitment to our customers that sets you apart from other airline workers in our industry. You are, without a doubt, the best in the industry, and our members could not have prevented the unfortunate course of events in MDW.

Moving forward, everyone must learn from this failure and conduct an honest evaluation with a review of all contributing factors. Southwest Airlines will conduct the first meeting (briefing) to examine all the contributing factors on January 22, 2014 and officers and staff from your union will be in attendance.

In closing, I would like to once again thank our MDW members, members who assisted in MDW, and members in the other cold-weather stations who do their very best to serve our Southwest Airlines customers, even when the working conditions are brutal.
Fraternally,
Charles Cerf
President
TWU Local 555

Addressing the Elephant in the Room
Every time I write a newsletter article I try to think of something positive to write about. It may not appear like that, but that is my intention. The problem that I face is that I have been here for 29 plus years and I have a reference point to compare days gone by. I can get nostalgic, one of the benefits of growing old, even if it is not so gracefully. I start out by thinking that I am thankful that I have been employed at a company that has enabled me to take care of my family and send my kids through college, help them out in times of need and put food on the table, clothes on their backs, and provide them with the necessities of life and along the way provide a few thrills and frills. These are all due to the contractually negotiated wages and benefits that have been secured by the union. There is no doubt that SWA provides these paychecks but there is also no doubt that it is not due to the benevolence of SWA. It was negotiated, or I would not have them. I love my company, and I am very appreciative of having a secure place of employment and a profit sharing and 401K program that should allow me to retire at some point, God willing. I truly believe that this is a great company to work for, but it is a business. Most management are truly good and caring people, but we have some that should get a taste of their own lack of compassion and empathy that they display and administer to the agents that they manage and direct.

I am reminded of this by an incident that happened during the week after Christmas in one of our Midwestern cities. I will not mention names to protect the not so innocent. This is a true and accurate story.

First some background - There was a former AirTran employee, based in ATL, that was blessed by becoming an SWA employee. Her world has been rocked and forever changed by the acquisition/merger with and by SWA. She received many greater perks, including wages and benefits, but she also was subjected to cultural and employment shock. She is a single mother with three children. It is a well-known fact that the members of TWU do more with less in the service of SWA. This agent was forced to relocate to another city in the Midwest due to ATL being overstaffed by SWA standards and staffing needs. SWA did give her a job at another location at least. This act of benevolence still did not make the transition easy. I want to be fair. This agent has struggled with some minor job performance issues since converting. She was issued a Letter of Instruction for failure to wear a seatbelt. She pointed out to the supervisor that he doesn’t wear the seatbelt when he takes the tug to the parking lot and that she would write him up in the future. She was issued a Letter of Warning for that comment. The company started a paper trail on the agent at this point. She was issued a Final Warning Letter followed by another Final with a suspension day included. That is the background concerning this agent.

Now to the rest of the story! This agent was called on a shift trade off on Saturday, December 28 at home in ATL. (She has an apartment that she shares in the Midwest station, but her child stays in ATL with relatives.) Management called her and told her that they realized she had traded off but asked if could she help them out by coming in for overtime the next day. She was asked what time she could get to the station for overtime for the next day. She responded that she would be there by 1:30. Upon arrival she was brought into a Results of Fact Finder and was promptly terminated. She had a fact finder on 12/18, and I believe that the company thought that they had to bring her in on that day due to the time frame restrictions of our CBA. That would be inaccurate. Since she made herself unavailable they had until her first day back. Maybe that it would have interfered with the Manager Grinch’s holiday time off, they brought her in under the pretense of needing her for overtime and she willingly came in to help them out even though she had traded off. I got a phone call from the local representative and was told that not only did they fire the agent but they did not provide her with non-revenue travel back to her home in ATL. I do not think that anyone that knows me will doubt when I say that this action pushed my buttons. I immediately started up my communications directory and after many failed attempts to reach a higher ranking official (it was a Saturday
Fitness for Duty is a term that can be taken lightly by our agents. Whether you wake up feeling one hundred percent or not is one thing, being deemed Not Fit for Duty is another thing entirely.

Whether your illness or injury was brought on by a work related event or a non-work related event, the contract allows for a Company Required Physical. Article 17. I (Company Required Physical) states, 

_The company may, at its expense, require an Employee to submit to a physical examination at any time by a doctor of the Company's choosing._

This is in reference to safety and health in the workplace and protects all employees from someone who appears to be impaired while working in the midst of dedicated agents and heavy equipment. Fitness for Duty is also alluded to in Article 13. C (Company/Examination), which states,

_The company may, at its expense, require the injured Employee to submit to a physical examination by a qualified medical doctor of the Company's choosing at any time. Using leave or OJI pay for a purpose other than that intended constitutes abuse and shall warrant immediate terminations._

This is in reference to the company’s ability to require that you see a “company doctor” to substantiate your need for continued coverage related to an ongoing OJI. Also worth mentioning is paragraph D of the same article (Neutral/Physical Exam), which states,

_In case of conflict between the company doctor's and the Employee's personal doctor's examinations, the Employee shall have the right to an examination by a qualified medical doctor agreed upon by the Union and the Company. The maximum cost of such examination shall be set by the Union and the Company, and the cost shall be borne equally by the Employee and the Company._

This language gives the agent the opportunity for a third opinion if a “company doctor” deems him not fit for duty after the agent's doctor has advised that he is fit for duty. The third opinion process can be very lengthy. It involves the company and the agent submitting names of condition-specific doctors who are willing to rule on a third opinion case, which is legally binding. Once made, one would have to go to extraordinary lengths to attempt to overturn the decision.

The term fitness for duty can be complicated. In some cases when an agent is deemed permanently disabled he is no longer fit for duty and a drastic change has to occur. That drastic change could be lengthy time off of work, a required surgery, or it could mean that the agent cannot return to work in the classification that he was employed—the worst case scenario. An agent's ability to do the job does not simply correlate to the ability to do everyday life functions. It is whether the agent can perform essential job functions. This list of essential functions of positions focuses on the purpose of the functions and the results to be accomplished rather than the manner in which the function is to be performed. It does include the physical actions and physical environment in which the task is to be performed. You must simply be able to perform your job in a safe manner without harm to you or anyone around you.

There have been a few occasions where agents have advised local management that they cannot work in high places or closed-in spaces, and they have been ill-advised by management that if they bring a doctor's note stating such, they may be medically excused from performing certain job duties. Much to their dismay they find themselves being sent home or placed on a medical leave of absence for not being fit for duty, because they are essential functions of the job (e.g. operating at heights in the bucket of a de-icing truck or working in the confines of the bin of the aircraft. These agents are then compelled to return to work with a full-duty release from the physician.
2013 TWU Local 555

Scholarship Winners

Lauren Syzbiack
District 1
Parent:
Ernest Syzbiack
PHL Ramp
School:
Camden County College

Kara J. Clark
District 4
Parent:
Perry Clark
STL Ramp
School:
Morgan State University

Chase Ross
District 3
Parent:
Daniel Ross
CLE Cargo
School:
Cleveland State University

Taylor Wassum
District 2
Parent:
Phil Wassum
MCO Ramp
School:
Valencia College

Leland King II
District 7
Parent:
Joseph Addis
PHX Provo
School:
Paradise Valley Community College

Andrew Addis
District 6
Parent:
Prince Shelby
OAK Ramp
School:
Diablo Valley College

Nakaela P. Shelby
District 8
Parent:
Shad Anderson
SAT Ramp
School:
Info not received

Parent:
Ernest Syzbiack
PHL Ramp
School:
Camden County College

Parent:
Daniel Ross
CLE Cargo
School:
Cleveland State University

Parent:
Joseph Addis
PHX Provo
School:
Paradise Valley Community College

Parent:
Prince Shelby
OAK Ramp
School:
Diablo Valley College

Parent:
Phil Wassum
MCO Ramp
School:
Valencia College

Parent:
Perry Clark
STL Ramp
School:
Morgan State University

Parent:
Shad Anderson
SAT Ramp
School:
Info not received
ATL Ramp Agent Kennetta Carter grew up in MDW, where she was hired as a ramp agent in 2005. She transferred to ATL in 2012. “My mother moved to ATL, so when ATL opened, it was the perfect opportunity to move close to her”, explained Kennetta. “We have new members here who are working to educate themselves on our contract, and I decided to help because so many new members had questions about how things work.”

Kennetta serves as the TWU Safety Chairperson in ATL. She recently attended a safety training class conducted by TWU Local 555 safety and health advisor Jesse Soto and learned more about how to apply article 17 of our collective bargaining agreement in the workplace. It can be a challenge and the operation can be frustrating, but she thinks ATL will be a better station when the transition is complete. “Members are happy to have a union behind them, and they are anxious to have a new contract,” said Kennetta.

Outside of work, Kennetta is a busy mother of two daughters: Kaniyah, age 10; and Kaliyah, age 6. Kennetta and her husband, Tony, have been together for 14 years, and Tony was able to transfer to ATL with his job with the Department of Children and Family Services. She said she loves living in ATL and her girls enjoy living close to Granny. The family enjoys roller-skating, shopping, and going to the movies.

Kennetta was recently sworn in as a delegate for the North Georgia Atlanta Central Labor Council and looks forward to becoming more involved in the ATL labor community. Kennetta explains, “I was surprised at the first meeting that it was like a family; union workers talked about each others’ problems and helping each other.” Ray Rosero, ATL provisioning agent and TWU representative/education committee member, was also sworn in as a delegate. In addition, Kennetta is participating in the newly formed TWU Local 555 ATL Unity Committee.

Thanks for representing our sisters and brothers in ATL, Kennetta!
As you may already know, in early January our Chicago brothers and sisters found themselves working in the midst of massive snowfall and near record low temperatures. It was a struggle to get to work, much less work shift after shift of mandatory overtime in subzero conditions. From what I have been told, several of our members who are Indiana residents were prohibited from even using the roads for non-emergency purposes. But what was colder than the Midway tarmac? Management’s heavy-handed approach to addressing their long standing manpower shortages at Midway and in the middle of blizzard conditions that they already knew were coming their way. While Chicagoland struggled to keep schools open and streets clear, other airlines altered their schedules in anticipation of the weather. What did our management do? They were busy writing directives and issuing threats.

When Steve Goldberg, Managing Director of Ground Operations, declared his “State of Operational Emergency” for MDW, I had to ask, “What the hell is that?” Goldberg claimed for the company among other things the special privilege of demanding doctors notes from anyone who calls in sick during the stated emergency. There is of course no such provision in the contract. I was reminded of the comedy Animal House, when Dean Wormer decides to place the Delta Tau Chi House on “Double Secret Probation”. (If you are seriously too young to remember this classic, download it today.) Just as Faber College’s pompous Dean of Students doesn’t have the right to make up the rules as he goes along, Goldberg and other managers at Southwest do not have the power to disregard our collective bargaining agreement whenever they see fit, snow or no snow.

The Wormers of this world thrive when their assertions go unchallenged. We must therefore all take the time to know what’s in our contract and speak up when we feel it is being violated. I am proud that our union leadership has taken an aggressive stance on this matter. Of course, they really have no choice. It’s a case of defend the contract or else it becomes meaningless. Let’s all show our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in MDW. It’s been a difficult season. And now they are dealing with management’s intransigence. They sure could use your backing. I think it would be a great idea if each station were to record a j-line message and pass it on. But really, any sign of support is valuable. Stick together brothers and sisters or you might find that you are the next to be placed on Double Secret Probation.

**THE DEEP FREEZE** – Brad Pinchot (ONT Ramp)

As you may already know, in early January our Chicago brothers and sisters found themselves working in the midst of massive snowfall and near record low temperatures. It was a struggle to get to work, much less work shift after shift of mandatory overtime in subzero conditions. From what I have been told, several of our members who are Indiana residents were prohibited from even using the roads for non-emergency purposes. But what was colder than the Midway tarmac? Management’s heavy-handed approach to addressing their long standing manpower shortages at Midway and in the middle of blizzard conditions that they already knew were coming their way. While Chicagoland struggled to keep schools open and streets clear, other airlines altered their schedules in anticipation of the weather. What did our management do? They were busy writing directives and issuing threats.

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**KinCare 2014 Update**

The company is taking the most aggressive stance possible with regard to California KinCare. I am of the belief that you should take advantage of any and every benefit you are lawfully allowed. Please remember, that it is your responsibility to understand the rules governing the use of such benefit.

Current concerns at hand are...

- You must have sick hours in your bank to cover the time requested for KinCare.
- You will receive an RPA if you don’t have sufficient hours.
- You will not be charged/paid more than 8 hours of sick pay in one day.
- If you are on a double, hours over 8 will be “Without Pay”.
- A KinCare day cannot be taken UNPAID.
- If you don’t qualify to be paid you will receive an RPA.

BEFORE you attempt to use KinCare please ask questions and be sure you qualify. Please do not hesitate to call the union office so that you can be informed and protected. – Amye Hollins
Happy New Year! Hopefully everyone had a good holiday season and didn’t get mandatory OT too often, so you were able to spend some time with your family. To all of our brothers and sisters at MDW and everyone else who went there to help out during a very difficult time, thank you!

At the start of 2014, there were a lot of members surprised by the fact that while on an extended approved medical leave in 2013, they did not get all of their expected vacation in 2014. This is due to the length of their medical leave in 2013. The specific language of Article 12.C.2 states that no vacation accrues after 180 days of a leave, so what that means is that if you are on a medical leave of more than 180 days you stop accruing vacation for the following year. This language is supported by an arbitrator’s decision from August 2012. You can find all the details of this decision and other arbitration decisions on our website at twu555.org.

This brings me to the real reason for writing this article, and that is our website. If you take some time to go to the website, you will notice that there is information and answers to the many questions members have on a daily basis. As a union member you are empowered with easy access to the knowledge needed to be educated on the contract. I encourage everyone to register on the website, which will take you less than five minutes. By registering, you will have full access to the website, including over 25 arbitration decisions like the one above. This will help you understand why certain rules change or are implemented in the first place. The web site also has quick links to our contract and work rule interpretations without even signing in. You have easy access to grievance forms, and it even gives you the option to type out your grievance from your PC, if you choose to do so. To make things easier you can access our website from most of the computers at your station. So remember, knowledge is king! You have all the knowledge at your fingertips at twu555.org.

Within the last year, Local 555 started a Facebook page to share information and events going on around the system and with the company. The participation on our FB page has been exceptionally good. We have over 1,600 likes and that number is growing every day. I do want to point out that our FB page is a fun way to share information of events going on around the system. However, it’s not for airing out our dirty laundry or complaining. We have to stay within the guidelines of the company’s social media policy. For that reason it may be necessary at times to delete some of the comments that are made on the page.

In closing, I would like to thank Jason Gomes from SNA ramp who is our web site administrator/graphic designer. He is the man who turns all of our ideas into reality.
As we all are aware the entire Midwest and eastern United States recently experienced a brutal cold snap. Cold weather is not something new and certainly not something that will keep us from working as if it were business as usual. With that being said, we do have to be aware that in times of extreme weather we have to take the proper precautions to protect ourselves.

This most recent extreme cold was blamed on something called “The Polar Vortex”. According to the National Weather Service, “The Polar Vortex is not something in itself dangerous to humans, but the cold, arctic air associated with them at the surface could be.” You can rest assured that though we as agents might not have been aware of what The Polar Vortex was, Southwest Airlines should have been aware of it. They also should have known what these conditions could do to our bodies. In fact, “the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) requires employers to comply with hazard-specific safety and health standards. In addition, pursuant to Section 5(a)(1) of the OSH Act, employers must provide their employees with a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm.”

As human beings we know when our bodies are telling us it is time to come in from the elements, but sometimes members of leadership have differing opinions. The fact is that as agents each and every one of us take pride in providing our customers with the legendary service they have come to expect. We begin to think that if we go indoors to warm up we will somehow fail our customers. This is simply not true, and Southwest does not expect us to put our bodies in harm’s way. They prove this with their own five basic principles of safety.

#1 Protect Yourself!
#2 Protect Each Other!
#3 Protect our Customers!
#4 Protect our Aircraft!
#5 Protect our Equipment!

The next time you find yourself in a situation where you might suffer harm, you must protect yourself first. Remember that if you are truly working safe the company will have no reason to issue discipline for unsafe behavior.
Hats off to Chicago

MDW stationed and temp workers faced one of the coldest winter storms in the last quarter century. Working in miserable conditions, many members faced the Polar Vortex without the proper winter attire. You persevered through it like the warriors that you are. We wanted to take the time to say THANK YOU!!! (That goes for all the stations that dealt with this storm as well.) Here’s what your fellow brothers and sisters are saying about the working conditions they faced during this cold weather event.

“I had on three pairs of cold weather engineered socks and I couldn’t feel my toes after 10 minutes. The best way to describe the operational situation is as a complete and utter debacle.”
Boni Renteria, AUS Ramp Agent and TWU Representative who temped in MDW

“In 16 winters on the MDW ramp, this is the worst winter, hands down. There were carts frozen to the ground. I was deicing carts and lav latches. Waste was frozen inside and came out when deiced. The 800 a/c is a game-changer; they break down your body. At 2:00 a.m., there were still twelve 800s waiting for gates. O’Hara was closed, but MDW remained open.”
Juan Cordova, MDW Ramp Agent and TWU Representative

Crew scheduling was a mess. One of my flights showed the crew to be originating, and they were actually in RDU. I was on the phone for three and a half hours trying to reach scheduling; I asked a passenger to hold the phone while I went to the restroom. Then when I finally reached scheduling, they said “oh, okay, I’ll look into it.”
Cathy Wilk, MDW Operations Agent

“It was hard to breathe out there because it was so cold, and you’re all bundled up trying to stay warm and not get frostbite. What those agents do up there is amazing.”
Markel Ricks, LIT Ramp Agent who temped in MDW

“It was so cold, your breath was freezing to your eyelashes, eyebrows and beard if outside for five minutes. It was -30º F with -65º F wind-chill.”
Mark Marispin, MSP Ramp Agent

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“There was a lot of mandatory overtime and people were tired. Wind chill was 45°F to 50°F below zero one day, and I was running transfers. There were 120 bags on a flight I was trying to run, but it was so cold you couldn’t stay outside for long periods, and I couldn’t keep up with flights. There was no manpower to plow gates and carts were stuck in the snow. We didn’t have enough working equipment and the fuelers couldn’t keep up either; one of them suffered frostbite and they were short-staffed.”  

*Wes Saleaumua, SAN Ramp Agent who temped in MDW*

“Conditions in MDW were beyond words. One MDW ramp agent, who had worked more than 20 hours straight, had towels wrapped around his toes trying to prevent frostbite, but when the boots were removed, blisters were starting to form.”  

*Raul Cano, MSP Ramp Agent and TWU Representative who temped in MDW*

“Everyone is talking about the winter-weather event, but the operational problems in MDW began before the storm. On Christmas night, we had flights hold short because there was not a manager on duty to make the decision to move deicing to the pad. On January 3rd, a flight with 50 deadheading crew members was cancelled, setting us up for failure. Also on the January 3rd, I worked a full originator with no crew listed; the crew scheduler said ‘oh, sh**, we’ll put the trip in open time.’ How dare the company try to blame the ramp! I talked to one new ramp agent who had worked twelve doubles in a row and was afraid to turn down overtime because he didn’t want to get in trouble. It was embarrassing.”  

*Suzanne Reynolds, MDW Operations Agent*

“BUF experienced a blizzard with white-out conditions. Southwest ceased operations for two days because of the conditions and unbearable wind chill factors of -10°F to -20°F. There was a wind chill chart posted to inform us how long you could be outside before risking frostbite/hypothermia. I’ve never experienced anything like this, and I’ve lived here all my life.”  

*Rich Perry, BUF Ramp Agent and TWU Representative*

“I was diagnosed with having frostbite. While working my hands started tingling, then a blister formed on my finger. When I took the band-aid off the next day, some of my skin tore off. I had on warm gloves and was dressed warmly, so I didn’t expect this to happen. I’ve worked on the ramp for six other winters in MDW and this was brutal.”  

*Kevin England, MDW Ramp Agent*

“I was born and raised in SAN and didn’t know how cold it was going to be in MDW. I didn’t have boots, so I worked in tennis shoes. They were trying to operate like it was a sunny day – they were beyond dangerous working conditions in MDW.”  

*Wes Saleaumua, SAN Ramp Agent who temped in MDW*
It’s all your fault, you lazy, good for nothings! That’s the message our brothers and sisters in Chicago got in January after the MDW meltdown. It was all your fault! We don’t care about Mother Nature. We don’t care that pieces of equipment were running out of fuel because equipment was unable to be fueled. We don’t care that bodies were already broken down because we’ve short staffed you guys for years, like we have all of our other stations, and a lot of you guys had already been working 16, 24, 32 hour shifts. Who cares?! You guys should know by now, we do more with less. We’ve been killing you for years. Why is this any different? You guys should know by now, we’ve made you work two man flights the last several years. Even on 800s we’ve made you work two man flights. So what’s your complaint? We don’t care that other issues arose. So what if the doors on trains were freezing and added to the delays of agents getting to work (for those who could get to work). We don’t care that the Arctic freezing air caused signal problems for trains or that it wouldn’t let your cars start. Walk in the frozen tundra you lazy, good for nothings. We’ve got an image to upkeep not the real image that the public doesn’t know about, but the fake one they’re unaware of that makes us look like the darling of the aviation industry. We don’t even care if equipment breaks down on you. Make it work. You guys have always made our bad ideas work in the past. We’ve always grossly mismanaged our stations and given you idiotic game plans. We come up with the bullsh*t, you make it work. That’s been our relationship now for almost 10 years. You know this already. So, again, what’s your gripe?!

Peons
If you haven’t guessed it by now, this is how we’re viewed. So who’s going to be held accountable for the gross mismanagement? Whose decision was it to keep operating in -40 below temperatures? I hope you’re reading this you sack. It’s because of you that MDW employees and our passengers dealt with what they did those several days of unbearable, impossible weather. You guys have turned this into a legacy airline. Why didn’t you follow their footsteps and cease operations? JetBlue ceased operations in JFK the day before we even got hit here. Why didn’t we do the same in MDW? AA and UA cancelled numerous flights out of ORD. Why didn’t we? Why did we put everyone’s health and safety at risk? So we could have a better January money wise? Was that the goal here? The more important question is, who’s going to be held accountable for putting all these peoples’ safety/health at risk? Who’s responsible for the gross mismanagement of the MDW meltdown?

Of course we all know how that works. Nothing will be done to that person. Just like the same person, or persons, that were responsible for costing us a billion dollars in fuel hedging. They’re running the freakin company now. You see the correlation. Screw up our profits and we promote you to running the joint. That’s how we roll. Instead, what we do is blame everyone else. It’s all you peons’ fault. We run the joint, we make the rules, we blame/discipline you. Rules, what rules? We change the rules. Forget that stupid little red book all sides must follow. We’ll change the language, ignore the articles and do what we want. Court, HAH, we laugh at court. We don’t care what they make us do. The money keeps rolling in. And that ladies and gentlemen, if you haven’t guessed by now, is what we’re all about. Rules, forget the rules. Rules are constantly ignored. When they don’t suit the argument or situation, they’re changed. Just check SWALife. See how many “updates” there are in the GOM. That’s called a rule change.

Happens a lot doesn’t it. Especially when their own rules are used against their arguments/discipline. Yep, that’s life in the fast lane. We run over and trample everybody for the sake of that everlasting goal of 15% that’s been promised for years. Funny, but when an employee doesn’t live up to the end of his bargain on job performance, he’s disciplined, possibly all the way up to the ultimate goal of termination. When the people running the joint don’t live up to their end, they get more raises/bonuses while refusing to give anyone else their share of the pie. Hmmmm. Does that sit right with you guys?

Well, no matter how much I write, nothing will ever change. There is no shame from the people we’re supposed to be looking up to like we used to when we had a real leader. In the old days, employees would never have been marched into fact-findings for a debacle that was caused by the people running this airline. Shame? Accountability? Puhhlease, that’s for you guys. Out with old, in with the new.

In closing, it’s still winter. Take care of each other. Watch out for each other because, obviously, no one else will. All we have is each other. It’s very clear we can’t depend on our leaders.
I would like to start this article by giving a big congrats to Patti Adams, our local’s new grievance specialist. Although I haven’t known Patti personally for too long, her reputation speaks for itself as being a person with great experience and knowledge of our contract and as being a strong union advocate.

Well brothers and sisters, a new year has started. I know all of us are still thinking the same thing at this point: why are the members of Local 555 being hit even worse with excessive discipline for actions that, in the past, may have warranted little or no discipline at all? Unfortunately I don’t have all the answers to this. Some would say because we are in contract negotiations, or some would say the company has just simply changed their ways on how they treat their employees. All I can say is if anyone out there is being disciplined, even if it is for the smallest infraction, please go talk with one of your reps so he or she can direct you on what you should do. This is the purpose of being in the union. The grievance process is part of the contract that we all voted on. This process allows us to challenge disciplinary actions and/or any violations to the CBA that the company may try and take against us.

For plenty of us the grievance process ultimately has saved us from having incriminating paperwork in our files, from suspensions, or even from being fired. Imagine right now if you were not part of a union and disciplinary action had been taken against you. You could have your pay suspended without just cause. You would not have the benefits you have. Most importantly, you wouldn’t have a voice on your behalf if the company was violating your contractual rights. We live in a country where unions have been under heavy attack by corporate America, politicians, and much of the public in general. Members of Local 555, if you haven’t already started taking pride in being part of this union, being a union member who has the industry’s leading contract, you should, because if you think we would have all the same perks and benefits without being in our union, think again.

I know all of us won’t always get along all of the time, or we may just simply not like each other, but now is the time to set our differences aside so that we will be a united front of hardworking union members who are not afraid to stand up to the company. We have 12 executive board members for this local and, believe it or not, you the members of this local are the ones that give us power to fight for contractual rights and fight for the new and improved contract that we all deserve. There has always been strength in numbers, so I will say it again…the time is now to be united and to hold steadfast! Brother and sisters, please take what I am saying seriously. This is not what some might call “lip service”. I really do mean what I am saying.

I am a very passionate person and really believe in this union, and I know what this local is capable of. I just ask you to take a minute and ask yourself if you are striving to put some effort into making our union stronger. Or, do you sit back and think maybe a few station reps or district reps, or even some of the other members, can take care of everything? I can tell everyone with full honesty that this type of attitude weakens us. If everyone as a whole would dig deep and put forth a little effort and attitude, I think everyone in this local would be very surprised when all of us are on the same page, so I challenge everyone to become more involved within our local.

I plead for every member to be patient with these contract negotiations and to take part in more union activities and meetings. I will say it again…we will not vote on a contract that does not benefit us for the better, so start getting involved and everyone do your part to fight and get the contract we the members deserve.

In closing, I hope everyone had a great Christmas and New Year with your friends and loved ones. Remember, with spring approaching that means a busy schedule for most of us. Do what it takes to work safe and protect each other.

Phil McNally
The winter months always bring enormous challenges for all members that must work outside in the snow and frigid temperatures. This winter has not been any different, either. Over the Christmas and New Year holiday the MDW station experienced record low temps and several inches of snow. Members were required to work in dangerous conditions without Headquarters having any regards for their safety. Members were pushed to the point where their bodies were breaking down and their health was failing.  

On January 7 the G. O. issued a memorandum to “All MDW Ramp Employees” informing them that they had declared a “State of Operational Emergency”. 

Although this memo began with an empty thank you, they proceeded to degrade and belittle the many members that work at the MDW station. They placed blame for this situation solely at the feet of the over 600 hard-working ramp agents in MDW. The G. O. declared that effective 00:01 on January 7, 2014 MDW was in a “State of Operational Emergency” because of the many members who had become ill as a result of management’s failure to provide safe working conditions. 

What was not mentioned in this memo was that these same agents that were threatened had been consistently mandatoried on a regular basis since mid-2013. This occurred when the weather was relatively nice and not the polar vortex that they experienced recently. These same members have been working under the threat of discipline of up-to-and-including termination for a long time now, as it appears that this is the preferred, or only, method of managing. It is important to take stock in the many real factors that directly caused this very unfortunate situation. The list is as follows: 

- MOT being at record levels at the MDW station since mid-2013
- Largest level of 800 aircrafts in the SWA system being worked at the MDW station
- Inadequate and improper staffing to work the 800 aircraft
- Inadequate amount of safe operating equipment for agents to perform their duties
- Holiday season increasing baggage and cargo loads
- Severe weather limiting all activities and hindering agents
- Slippery and hazardous walking and working surfaces
- Using MOT as a staffing tool and not a last resort

These are just a few causes of the situation that the station was in and none include agents not coming to work. Another factor that we must recognize is that instead of addressing these concerns before the holiday season or before the winter storms occurred, Dallas chose to ignore them and continue managing with threats and intimidation. 

I find it intriguing that American Airlines chose to cancel flights and suspend operations instead of forcing their employees into a recognizably hazardous work environment with threats of termination. In my opinion, the true cause of this situation lies in Dallas’ failure to provide the MDW station and those members with the proper infrastructure and staffing to help prevent this from happening. That rests solely in Dallas’ lap. 

With that said, their decision to institute a phantom state of emergency was a direct violation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement between TWU Local 555 and Southwest Airlines, and it will not be tolerated. They chose to throw the contract aside by telling members that they must go to the doctor or be subjected to potential discipline. The sole reason for this disaster was the weather and the lack of preplanning by Dallas. The members of this union pride ourselves with demonstrating the warrior spirit in trying to get the flights out and getting the job done. This is what this airline was founded on, and we will not stand idly by and watch these so-called leaders tear it down while blaming us in the process. We have made and continue to make this airline great while we are outside in the snow and frigid temperatures, not those who are sitting in their warm offices in Dallas. We will not stand by and be the scapegoat for Dallas’ failure anymore. 

UNITED!!! INVINCIBLE!!!

Randy Barnes
I’m not really sure what to write about this time, so I’ll just give y’all a short list of what my schedule is as of today, January 16, concerning system boards and arbitrations. I have five system boards scheduled for the next 15 days, one from provo, two for ops, and two from the ramp. It looks like at least four of these will be proceeding to arbitration, as the system board procedure no longer serves a purpose: it is simply a procedure we go through in order to proceed to arbitration.

Currently, I have two arbitrations scheduled for February and have already presented one on the 8th of this month. At this time, it is more than likely that our district will have at least six system boards in February, as I am scheduling them at this time. As you should know, our contract requires the board to convene within 15 days of us requesting a system board, and it looks like all of these six will be moving on to arbitration.

Our district currently has around 12 grievances moving up the ladder that will be proceeding to system boards. I’m simply waiting for them to be denied at the station management level, so I can get them on my schedule for the inevitable system boards. I’m hoping that I may be able to settle about half of these with the company, but it appears that they are good grievances and will be forwarded to an arbitrator in order for us to get a precedent setting ruling.

As you should be able to see SWA is disciplining agents for going too fast, forgetting to count every bag, failing to do F.O.D. walks and walk-arounds prior to push, letting passengers down the jetway without a valid boarding pass, not performing brake checks, not requesting a guide agent while backing your truck between A/C, etc. If you think you have read or been told that some action you are about to perform could be construed as a violation of all those rules we have now-a-days…don’t do it! Avoiding the remotest possibility of a rule infraction will make your life and my life a lot easier.

Mark Waters

[Signature]
Robert Bettinger
District 5 Rep

I was told that the weather phenomenon that crippled MDW the first week of January was caused by a polar vertex. Now while SWA cannot control the weather, they can and should control other factors that they simply chose to ignore. I was stunned to hear stories from temporary agents who went from our great district to help out in MDW during the extreme weather conditions.

This is just a short list of the contractual violations that occurred, and all were avoidable had management abided by our contract:

**Article 6 violation (Hour of Service)**
- When the temp agents got to MDW, they should have been assigned a schedule. They were not. Since no one had a schedule the agents could not invoke their 10 hour rest rule if needed.

**Article 7 violation (Overtime)**
- Agents were awarded overtime by whoever signed the overtime call book first rather than by seniority. (Not to mention that if you did not sign the book, you would not get any shift at all!)

**Article 16 violations (Temp Assignments)**
- In at least one station within our great district, the station did not even follow seniority when assigning the temps to go to MDW.
- When the agents left their stations they should have been given a per diem check to cover expenses. Rather than follow the contract, the supervisors provided meal vouchers the first few days to eat in the airport, but then stopped providing vouchers despite the fact that the temps had not received their per diem checks.

**Article 17 violation (Safety and Health)**
- Chocks were not always available to chock aircraft.
- Some of the gates had no wands to marshal aircraft.
- Numerous pieces of ground equipment were broken prior to the onset of bad weather.
- Bin slips were not completed according to the Ground Ops Manual.
- There were a lack of ramp agents assigned to 800 A/C

**Article 19 (Uniforms)**
- The temp agents were not given the proper clothing with which to work given the weather conditions. (Some of the temp agents came from SAN and were never given the heavy warm clothing needed for sub-zero wind chills.)

As I stated, all of these violations were totally avoidable had SWA honored the CBA and also showed some compassion for the agents who left their cities and volunteered to help the company during this extreme weather phenomena.

There is another story that I would like to share with you, coming from one of our reps who was temping in MDW during the January temp assignment. When the rep got to MDW, he noticed numerous safety violations that could have severely hurt our fellow brothers and sisters and disrupted the operation. Every time he saw an unsafe act he brought the item to management’s attention, all in an effort to protect the company and the membership. SWA thanked him by telling him that he was creating a ruckus and he was promptly sent home. On the day the station manager informed him he was being sent home, he had just stopped an agent from pushing an A/C after a supervisor had instructed the agent to use the end of a bungee cord as a bin pin. Brothers and sisters, our rep was not causing a ruckus. He was trying to prevent a possible accident that could have injured a fellow member and/or resulted in damage to an A/C. I am very proud of our members who went to help SWA during this polar vertex and also very proud of our members who speak up and insist that the company recognize our rights per the CBA.
It was not my intention to do this publicly. The article I wrote for this past summer’s newsletter apparently caused Southwest Airlines Vice President Airport Affairs Bob Montgomery enough embarrassment that he felt compelled to not only write a response but to send it to everyone in ground operations this past October. It was never my intention to embarrass Mr. Montgomery. I used an excerpt from a nationally best-selling book called Nuts! Southwest Airlines’ Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success, which was sent to every employee working at Southwest Airlines at the time it was published, to illustrate my point about the obvious change in the Southwest Airlines culture. I had no idea the embarrassment Mr. Montgomery would feel by his depiction in that book, in which he gave his personal account of a $400,000 mistake he caused Southwest Airlines.

In November, when I was at the Southwest Airlines headquarters to discuss grievances with labor relations, I attempted to make amends with Mr. Montgomery by speaking with him personally. I checked in with the security guard in the lobby and asked if Mr. Montgomery had a couple of minutes to see me. The security guard made a phone call to Mr. Montgomery’s office with my name and request. I was surprised at the response. It was evident from watching the security guard’s reaction that my request had caused untold consternation on the other end of the phone line and the guard told me that I would not be allowed to talk to Mr. Montgomery. My surprise grew when a second phone call followed concerning my visit. At five and a half feet tall, balding and wearing a bow tie, I must have presented a daunting and worrisome figure to cause such alarm.

Being denied the opportunity to personally apologize to Mr. Montgomery, I continued on to the Labor Relations department to discuss the plethora of grievances I had over excessive and unwarranted discipline. While in the Labor Relations section of headquarters, I happened to run into Chris Wahlenmaier, Southwest Airlines Vice President Ground Operations. I mentioned to him privately my desire to speak and apologize to Mr. Montgomery. Mr. Wahlenmaier told me that he would make sure it happened - that was three months ago. At this point, I can only speculate on the reason why Mr. Montgomery will not see me to let me apologize in person. Therefore, let me take this opportunity here and now to apologize. Mr. Montgomery, I am sincerely sorry for any embarrassment and hurt feelings that I caused you.

Let me be clear, I only apologize for any embarrassment caused to Mr. Montgomery, not for the content of the article. That I stand by. From the response to my article by fellow agents, supervisors, and managers, it is obvious that my opinion about the untimely death of our culture is shared by many. Perhaps distance is the reason for the disassociation of those that work at headquarters with those that work in the field, and why they continue to act like proverbial ostriches with their heads stuck in the sand regarding the changes happening all around them. If they cannot hear the dirge maybe it is because they are not listening. Despite the effort of the company to break the spirit of the employees, day in and day out the members of not only our local but also those who work the ticket counter, reservations, flight attendants and pilots (the “frontline employees”), strive to maintain the ideals that built this company. We all strive to provide the legendary customer service that built this airline. However, times have changed. Fun and forgiveness apparently no longer have a place for our frontline employees. Employees are now are given a month off without pay for mistakes costing far less than $400,000. Employees are treated with the disdain of an annoying necessity rather than the backbone of the company. Herb Kelleher, Former CEO Southwest Airlines, said, “If the employees come first, then they’re happy…. A motivated employee treats the customer well. The customer is happy so they keep coming back, which pleases the shareholders. It’s not one of the enduring green mysteries of all time, it is just the way it works.” Well the employees are not even dispassionate, let alone happy. Employees are subjected daily to excessive and, many times, unwarranted discipline.
I would like to thank the members of the SAN station for their hospitality at the recent Unity Day. A special thanks to Jilyn Kaczmarek, Gabe Sanchez, Bob Haas, John Kaczmarek, and Greg Puriski for coordinating and making the event a most enjoyable and memorable day, and to Fred Townsend for catering and serving delicious Mexican food to all 555 members. It was great to visit with all the members at the SAN station. The unity days will continue throughout the year, and I look forward to the opportunity to visit with our members around the system.

Southwest has recently announced another record profit year and anticipates that next year will set another record for profit. Their record profits indicate that they can afford to put a little on the table to go into our members’ pockets, not just their own. Let’s see what the next negotiations session brings now that this news is public.

Our members have been very patient throughout this long process of negotiations and continue to educate themselves on the issues that have kept negotiations from proceeding in a positive and timely manner. With that said, the membership has proven again that we are the main reason for these record profits, and Mr. Kelly continues to make that known to our customers in the Spirit magazine on a monthly basis. He just fails to let them know that at the table. His management team continues to tell your negotiating team that you will not be rewarded for your efforts.

Our members have continued to support Southwest Airlines and their continued success in spite of the way negotiations have gone. Examples of this are the way our members from around the system hopped on airplanes to fly to MDW to help this company operate despite the horrific conditions of manpower shortages created by the company and weather conditions that were not fit for any human beings to be out in, let alone working outside for hours upon hours. Another example is the way that our members continue to serve as trainers such as training our new ramp agents on all of the safe ways to perform all of the duties on the ramp as well as in other departments within the scope of TWU 555.

Hopefully our togetherness and dedication will be noticed and rewarded soon, and together we will have a contract that improves our quality of life and Southwest will continue to grow and prosper from that dedication that our members continue to provide.

Fraternally,
Mike Roach
District 7 Representative
New Year, New Attitude

First of all, I would like to wish you all a Happy New Year. As we all know, 2013 has been a challenging year for all of us – yet to be amended contract, SWA not bargaining in good faith, company bending the contract, excessive discipline with suspension, and now the MDW issues. This is the approach that Southwest leaders have taken. It is time for TWU members to step up to the plate and fight back. We need to know that the leaders at Southwest Airlines do not care about our families, nor do they care about the well-being of their employees. Just think what would happen if we were without a union!

I remember back in 2005, when I was hired with Southwest Airlines. Our leaders wanted me to remember our PURPOSE, VISION, MISSION, and COMMITMENT to employees. I was excited to be part of a family that loved their employees. Let’s talk about these four goals that Southwest Airlines leadership have identified on SWA Life, starting with PURPOSE, which is to “connect people to what’s important in their LIVES.” What about the union employees and their families? We haven’t had wage increase going on three years, and our medical benefits have changed. SWA made over 700 million dollars profit in 2013, and the forecast is Southwest Airlines will make over a billion dollars for the year of 2014. Southwest Airlines’ goal is to make a profit off the agents’ labor and not share the wealth with its union employees. We are the backbone of Southwest Airlines! We deserve wage increases, better working conditions, and, most of all, to be treated as part of the Southwest family.

Southwest Airlines VISION: “Become the world’s most loved, most flown and most profitable airline.” As you notice, the most profitable airline. This is definitely the direction this company is going, but off our hard work and dedication. Here is the problem we the TWU 555 members are facing. Southwest leaders are getting bonuses and other incentives, while we struggle to put our children through school and live comfortable lives.

Our MISSION: “The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth.” Now their mission is to give out letters to their employees for following Southwest’s so-called mission. Here is one example. An ops agent was working a flight at the Denver airport, and a customer had left his iPad on board. By the time the customer had recognized his iPad was missing all power to the aircraft was off. The agent took the customer down to the aircraft and proceeded to find the customer’s iPad with the light on his cell phone. Cell phone light went dead, so the agent used the aircraft flashlight and found the customer’s iPad. This customer was very happy and commended our ops agent for exercising that legendary Southwest customer service. This agent received a Letter of Instruction for using the flashlight.

TO OUR EMPLOYEES: Southwest leaders are committed to provide letter after letter, plus suspension, for our well-intentioned judgment calls and minor infractions. However, they are not committed to providing wage increases, despite record breaking profits, all off our labor.

This is the LUV company we all work for. Our goal for 2014 should be to work safe, work smarter, and exercise solidarity. Let’s pull together and fight the fight, because if we don’t we will find ourselves going in the wrong direction. No to concessions.

One of the things TWU 555 leaders have decided to do in order to promote unity and communication amongst our membership is to take the show on the road. We will have seven (7) board meeting at various cities.

Tennyson Berry
McCrummen Article Continued

evening) I received a call back and explained what happened, and they got involved in the fiasco. They called me back shortly and said that Manager Grinch said that the agent never asked for passes. I called the agent and asked if she had asked for passes. I was told by the agent that she had not, but she thought it would not have done any good because when she had been suspended with the last Final Warning she had asked and they had told her no. She would have to secure buddy pass, which she did. SWA did eventually provide her with the transportation to return to her home.

Shame on Manager Grinch. That is not how we treat our work family nor the agents you are charged with providing a comfortable work environment for. This story does have a happy ending, or at least a silver lining. I assigned the case to one of our grievance specialists, who did a great job and he was able to get the agent her job back. She was relocated to a southeastern station (she wanted out of the Midwestern station) where she lives with family. The southeastern station manager is one of the toughest that I know but also one of the most fair in regards to not allowing retaliation or harassment, in my opinion. (I don't always agree with the level of discipline administered but we know that comes out of HDQ and Labor Relations these days.) The agent will be given an opportunity to turn her job performance around and will not have a target on her back.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize our hard working agents that worked in MDW from January 1st through January 14th. The rumors and innuendos are unfair and do not do justice to what you recently had to endure, suffer, and work through. When it is all sorted out there will be facts exposed that will point out that the “meltdown” in MDW was principally due to the lack of management’s preparation and the chronic understaffing that MDW suffers through on a daily basis, even without the compounding and contributing factors of the weather conditions.

I am proud to say you’re your Local Executive Board will protect each member and ensure that the truth is exposed. We have filed multiple group grievances and a lawsuit in order to ensure that our members are not exposed to what we believe are improper and illegal actions by SWA.

I want to leave you with two quotes. The first on being a quote from Martin Luther King, a true friend to labor. “All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.” Let us try to uplift humanity and give it our best efforts. The second quote is from Sophacles, a great Greek playwright. “Without labor nothing prospers.” Without the results and benefit of our labor, there would be a lot less people at HDQ being able to provide for their families. It is time for the company to recognize this. I WANT A FAIR AND EQUITABLE CONTRACT. WE MADE RECORD PROFITS FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS. NEGOTIATE AND NOT DICTATE! Take care of each other and be safe. God bless all of you.

Fraternally,
Jerry McCrummen

Hollins Article Continued

In worker’s compensation cases the ability to obtain a full duty release can be tough. Your fitness for duty is judged solely on your body’s ability to take a lickin’ and keep on tickin’! Some agents may find that they are injured, go out for a little rest and rehabilitation and, return to work with no problems. Other agents have found that the inner-workings of their body types are not conducive to a life-long career as a ground operations employee. In these cases, agents may be out for a short or long period of time when their treating physicians deem them permanently disabled and stationery regarding lifting large amounts of weight. Seventy pounds is the weight requirement for the ground operations agents covered by our agreement with Southwest Airlines. That is a substantial amount of weight to lift if an agent has injured his or her shoulder, back, or knee. It is a large amount of weight even if you are not injured!

If you have been injured or know someone who has been injured, who is dealing with the tough news that he or she is no longer fit for duty and has questions about their options please do not hesitate to contact me in the union office. Each case is very different and the success of the outcomes depends greatly on the individual circumstances. There have been times when the contract language aids the employees’ return to work. It can be a slow and arduous process, but we have been successful when the agent’s abilities are really close to the requirements needed to perform the essential functions of the job. I can be reached in the union office at 1-800-595-7672 or at a.thompson@twu555.org

Bettinger Article Continued

Termination from Our District

Recently, we had a termination case that had to do with Facebook, again. This member called in ill while out of town. This by itself is not a terminating offense. However, him posting his picture at a pub then lying in a fact-finding meeting resulted in his being terminated. His grievance was withdrawn.

In closing, I would like to take this time to say thank you to Patti Adams for serving the membership as my alternate district rep. As of my writing this article, Patti has accepted the position of a grievance specialist. This is a sad loss to our district but a great addition to our grievance team. Patti will also stay on as our communications coordinator.

To the rest of the membership, thank you for allowing me to be your district rep. and God bless.

Robert Bettinger
We are enduring the company's unwillingness to negotiate a fair contract. While the average price of a ticket on Southwest Airlines went up nearly 13%, our pay went up 0%. The company went so far as to castigate our employees for the recent MDW debacle caused by weather and compounded by insufficient staffing and equipment.

The reality is that things have changed here at Southwest Airlines. We are no longer studied nor are books and thesis written about the Southwest Way. It does not take much thought to see the changes, and most employees are not happy with those changes. Yes, we are prosperous, yet we were prosperous in the past. I can offer no words of solace or comfort. I have no reason to believe that things will go back to the way they were. We must decide how we will deal with these changes, and I fear that the outcome of those decisions will further change our company. As our airline ages, our institutional memory clouds the way both internal and external customers were once treated. According to our institutional lore, our airline was created not on a spreadsheet but on a cocktail napkin. It is difficult to imagine why anyone would want to change a place that was conceived in a bar and was fun to work at into drudgery.

As always, Noli sinere te ab improbis opprimi.
Kevin Carney

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
TWU members and leaders from all over country, including TWU Local 555 Treasurer Ralph Darnell, honored Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy and lent a helping hand to Alpha House as a part of the recent AFL-CIO MLK Observance in San Antonio, TX.
Saturday Mail Delivery to Continue
January 16, 2014
By Stephanie West

A bipartisan omnibus spending bill released on Jan. 13 included funding for the continuation of the six-day mail delivery service. This avoided a crisis that would have affected thousands of postal workers and every American. “We are grateful that Congress recognizes the value of Saturday delivery to millions of American businesses that rely on the most efficient last-mile delivery system in the world,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “As the economy recovers and e-commerce booms, the Postal Service has returned to operational profitability, which would be threatened by cutting the Saturday service on which millions of small businesses and residents rely,” continued NALC President Rolando.

“Letter carriers and other postal employees have sacrificed tremendously to help the Postal Service recover from the Great Recession and adapt to technological changes. This sacrifice helped the Postal Service realize an operating profit in 2013. We are pleased that Congress has rejected the elimination of Saturday delivery as counter-productive; now we call on it to enact reform that will allow the Postal Service to innovate and grow—without dismantling the retail, processing and delivery networks that make it a national treasure,” concluded Rolando.

NLAB Charging Wal-Mart for Illegally Firing Workers

By SAM HANANEL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - Federal officials filed a formal complaint Wednesday charging that Wal-Mart violated the rights of workers who took part in protests and strikes against the company.

The National Labor Relations Board says Wal-Mart illegally fired, disciplined or threatened more than 60 employees in 14 states for participating in legally protected activities to complain about wages and working conditions at the nation’s largest retailer.

The labor board’s general counsel first laid out similar charges in November, but held off on filing a complaint while trying to work out a settlement with Wal-Mart. Those discussions were not successful, government officials said in a statement.

The company has insisted its actions were legal and justified.

“We now we have the opportunity to present the facts of these cases in front of a judge,” said Wal-Mart spokeswoman Brooke Buchanan. “No reasonable person thinks it’s ok for people to come and go from their scheduled shift without being held accountable.”

The protests in 2012 were organized by the union-backed group OUR Walmart, which has spent years pressing Wal-Mart to increase wages and benefits and make it easier for workers to organize a union. The group claims the majority of Wal-Mart associates are paid less than $25,000 a year.

Wal-Mart has until Jan. 28 to respond to the complaint. The case will then go before an administrative law judge. If Wal-Mart is found liable, it could be required to award workers back pay, reinstatement and reverse any disciplinary action. But the company could still try to work out a settlement as the case goes forward.

Support your Local Union Businesses

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