

A letter from a young US Postal Service worker

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For decades, the United States Postal Service (USPS) has maintained the narrative that the organization provides workers the opportunity to make a decent wage and receive full benefits, union protection, and a pension to provide support through retirement all while serving the broader public. In reality, the USPS has been in a process of gradual breakdown, facing constant pressure from the federal government and private competitors to reduce operating costs. The result has been austerity measures, degradation of working conditions, reduction of wages, gutting of employee benefit programs, and the slow death agony of a public service that reaches every community within the United States.

In April 2018, Donald Trump announced the formation of a task force whose purpose was to evaluate the Postal Service for a drastic overhaul, stating that even full privatization would not be off the table. Early last December, the Treasury Department released a 70-page proposal, which focuses heavily on reducing costs. Citing “personnel compensation” as a major issue, it suggests wages should be lowered to a level comparable to that of market competitors like FedEx. The report goes so far as to consider barring postal workers from the right to bargain collectively for wages and removing the Postal Service’s historic mandate to provide universal public service. These measures would plunge thousands of workers to the edge of poverty and deprive working class communities of necessary services.

Through all of this, the four postal unions—the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU), and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA)—have either remained silent or occasionally

feigned opposition while ultimately capitulating to the wishes of management. Once organizations that fought for workers’ interests, the unions have deteriorated into hollow husks and bureaucratized businesses that suppress the unity and strength of workers. The national officers of the unions receive compensation in the triple-figure range, which puts them in a completely different universe than the workers who sort and deliver the mail for a living.

With workers separated by craft and within each job designation, workers get varied pay rates, benefits, paid holidays, protections, etc. Their voices are divided, and workers are turned against each other as the unions are more concerned with protecting the work under their jurisdiction and securing dues money rather than fighting for workers. Jurisdictional squabbles extend from the union bureaucrats who spend much of their time enforcing jurisdictional rules, to the work floor where individual workers feel forced to protect their hours from being taken by a worker in another craft.

These union leaders have allowed the adoption of practices that are detrimental to the lives and well-being of USPS workers. This includes abandoning the right to strike and implementing a Kafkaesque system of different tiers that dictates the compensation and amount of work available based on what arbitrary category you fall into.

The tiers are structured as follows: Career, Non-career, and Casual, with the Career tier further broken down to FTR, PTR, PTF, and NTFT positions. These translate to Full-Time Regular, Part-Time Regular, Part-Time Flexible and Non-Traditional Full-Time.

Although workers within every category partake in almost identical work duties, each gets different pay and benefit compensation and a different number of guaranteed hours. The designations of “part-time” and

“full-time” have nothing to do with hours worked, but only the different wages and benefits they receive. Full-time employees are typically not worked over 40 hours and are given 2 days off a week, while part-time employees are worked 6+ days in a row, sometimes up to 14 straight days, typically working between 30 and 50 hours a week with only one day of rest.

Casual employees are hired on a temporary basis and generally for far fewer hours. They are given either a full-time work schedule for a fixed period (followed by removal from the position) or a permanent position that provides very few hours of work. This can be as little as two hours a day. Casuals also do not receive benefits and have no means of advancement.

Non-career employees do not receive the benefits career employees do. That means stripping them of a pension fund, sick leave, work guarantees, and federal health insurance. They are also provided a significantly lower wage for the same job. Many non-career employees serve as full-time employees for years or even decades before conversion to full-time positions, if they see that at all. Non-career work guarantees range from two to four hours or one work day a week, which is not a concession but an insult.

As a PSE/SSA (Postal Support Employee/Sales and Service Associate, which is a non-career clerk craft), I pay more in union dues than I do in state taxes. My shift-start times fluctuate from 2 a.m., 6 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m., and 2 p.m., on any day of the week. Sometimes I have very little time between two shifts. I’ve been forced to sleep parked in my car when given only a few hours between shifts just so I can make it in with at least some rest. Equipment is often damaged and unsafe, and the workplace is home to health risks like asbestos and lead.

Relations between workers and management can become tense, with verbal arguments breaking out on the work floor periodically. I’ve witnessed workers face vicious retaliation for standing up for their contracted rights.

The USPS employs around 644,000 workers who have complete control over the day-to-day operations of the flow of mail within the country. This is why the bourgeoisie and their union hacks want to divide and stifle our voices. We are employed in plants and offices in virtually every community in the country. Our struggles are closely tied with other logistics and

shipping workers, like FedEx, UPS and Amazon workers, as well as postal workers of other nations.

There is no solution to our strife within the framework of the unions. If workers want change, they must organize independently of the union bureaucracy and combine all the different crafts and tiers into rank-and-file committees seeking to unite postal workers across the country and internationally. We need a voice that will defend the interests of all workers, the working class as a whole.

I urge all workers to support the Socialist Equality Party and work to form these committees in their workplace. They will become the organs of struggle necessary to assert workers’ power and socialism in the days and years ahead.



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