

American Postal Workers Union prepares new betrayal

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Two hundred thousand American postal employees continue to work under a contract that was set to expire on September 20. Having failed to reach an agreement by the prescribed deadline, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) chose not to seek mediation, but to continue negotiating with the United States Postal Service (USPS). The union and the USPS had not reached a new agreement as of this writing and had made no significant information about negotiations available.

Whatever the outcome of the current talks, the final contract will continue the attacks that postal workers have endured for more than a decade. The APWU has been complicit in these attacks, which have included the closure of mail processing centers, wage cuts and the creation of a new tier of lower-paid workers. By the same token, the union bears responsibility for the ongoing degradation of mail delivery; an essential service on which millions of Americans rely.

A new stage in this degradation, the 10-year strategic plan entitled “Delivering for America,” took effect on October 1. The document, which was drafted by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, is nothing less than a business plan intended to hobble and discredit the USPS, thus clearing the way for its privatization.

The plan is so objectionable that 20 state attorneys general have sued the Postal Regulatory Commission, claiming that the plan had not been fully vetted. The plan will “destroy the timely mail service that people depend on for medications, bill payments and business operations in rural parts of the state,” said North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein in a statement.

DeJoy, who was appointed by President Donald Trump, stands to profit handsomely from this plan. Among other things, it calls for increased truck delivery, a job that the USPS frequently outsources.

DeJoy and his wife hold \$30 million of stock in XPO Logistics (a company that he previously served as CEO) and \$300,000 in UPS stock. The latter company could benefit from the privatization of the USPS.

DeJoy is not the only figure with conflicts of interest. Ron Bloom, chair of the USPS board of governors, is also vice chair and managing partner of investment firm Brookfield Asset Management, which owns \$500,000 in XPO stock. Moreover, documents released under the Freedom of Information Act show that DeJoy purchased \$305,000 in bonds issued by Brookfield, indicating a cozy relationship between him and Bloom.

The first step in the strategic plan is to lengthen the maximum delivery time for first-class mail from three days to five days. This measure, ostensibly undertaken to cut costs, will be accomplished by eliminating US Air Mail and transporting mail solely by truck. Eliminating US Air Mail, which was established in 1918, will set mail delivery back by more than a century.

The strategic plan also mandates the reduction of Post Offices’ operating hours and workers’ hours. Furthermore, the plan will raise prices for the public. The cost of a stamp already has increased by three cents, and the discount for periodicals has been cut by one cent.

In addition to cutting workers’ hours, the USPS will close 18 processing plants by November. Debby Szeredy, executive vice president of the APWU, published a 92-page document that she presents as a guide to help workers mobilize against plant closures. The guide emphasizes local and state actions but, apart from a few empty phrases, says nothing about mobilizing workers for a national fight.

More than anything else, the guide is intended to give workers the illusion that the APWU is advocating for

them. The USPS figures that it quotes, however, tell a different tale. In 2006, 673 processing and distribution centers remained open. By 2015, the USPS planned to reduce the number to 232. Thus, approximately two-thirds of the facilities that had been open in 2006 have been closed under the APWU's watch. These figures show that rather than resisting plant closures, the union is in fact complicit in them.

The only thing that DeJoy's plan will add, rather than cut, is 47 package annexes. The plan does not specify the connection of these annexes to existing postal facilities or describe the status of the workforce of the annexes. Nevertheless, the annexes will shift the USPS toward package delivery and place it into competition with UPS, FedEx and Amazon.

The APWU has been complicit not just in plant closures, but also in attacks on workers' wages. In 2006, Congress passed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, which required the USPS to fund postal retirees' health care in advance for 75 years. The annual cost of this unprecedented requirement is about \$5.5 billion, and it has created a financial crisis for the organization.

The APWU used this financial crisis to coerce workers into accepting concessions in the 2010 contract that it negotiated with the USPS. This agreement froze wages for the first two years and provided raises that barely kept pace with inflation in the remaining years. It contained no cost-of-living increases for the first two years and deferred them in the third and fourth years. Moreover, the contract created a second tier of workers who are paid about 10 percent less than their coworkers. It also expanded the USPS's temporary workforce, which enjoys even fewer benefits than full employees.

APWU President Mark Dimondstein admitted that ratification "was carried out in a rapid fashion with little time for digesting, debating and reflecting on the massive changes agreed to by the parties." He added that "the vote took place in a climate of uncertainty, confusion and fear." This rotten agreement that workers ratified under duress became the basis for subsequent contracts.

But the APWU's most criminal act has been to jeopardize postal workers' health and lives during the pandemic. The union has not only failed to demand adequate protections for workers, it also has helped the

USPS withhold vital information. It has supported the USPS's concealment of infections and deaths on the fraudulent basis of protecting privacy. Thus, workers do not know whether they or anyone else in their facility has been in contact with a coworker who tested positive for the virus. APWU bureaucrats have also bragged about having opposed a vaccine mandate, which is a necessary measure for ending the pandemic.

Postal workers can have no faith in the APWU as it negotiates with the USPS behind closed doors. For years, the union has proven itself a willing accomplice in the crippling of mail delivery and the erosion of workers' wages and working conditions. Like the other trade unions, it has degenerated into a tool for enforcing management's requirements and betraying workers' struggles.

As negotiations continue, the US is witnessing the largest strike wave in decades. Many of these struggles, like the ongoing strike at agricultural machinery manufacturer John Deere, and recent strikes at Volvo and Nabisco, began after workers roundly rejected sellout contracts that the unions had supported. Workers at Deere, Volvo and other companies have formed rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, to conduct their fights.

These workers are pointing the way forward for postal workers, who will not be able to make any gains by entrusting their welfare to the discredited APWU. Postal workers must create a rank-and-file committee and formulate demands and a strategy based on their objective needs. These committees, independent of the APWU, will formulate workers' demands and organize a strategy for struggle. Only through independent struggle can postal workers achieve victory.



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