Reject APWU sellout! Oppose Postal Reform Act robbery

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Are you a postal worker? Contact the WSWS and let us know what you think about the proposed contract.

Two months after the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) announced reaching a tentative agreement (TA) December 9 with the US Postal Service, some 200,000 APWU members have finally received the full text of the proposed contract, which they will vote on by February 28.

A livestream meeting on Tuesday the APWU called was not used to discuss the TA. Instead, workers were told that the terms of the agreement are conditional on passage of the Postal Service Reform Act that ensures the "financial stability" of the USPS by robbing $200 billion of health care pre-funding from retirees. The bill is awaiting a Senate vote, after passing the House by an overwhelming 342 to 92 margin.

Workers received the full text of the TA only after all three online union meetings held to ostensibly discuss the agreement were completed. This agreement is a product of the direct collusion between the APWU and the USPS Board of Governors aimed at imposing further draconian attacks on postal workers in preparation for the privatization of the postal service. The deal is aligned with Postmaster General Louis DeJoy's 10-year cost-cutting plan that will further cripple the postal service, already reeling from years of systematic defunding.

The TA has already evoked strong opposition, with workers denouncing the miserable 1.3 percent annual pay increases and inadequate cost-of-living adjustments that will mean a cut in real wages, with inflation now over 7 percent. Among other things the proposed contract maintains a multitier structure, with the bottom tier "postal support employees" denied the same benefits received by regular workers. Grueling work conditions, including long hours, forced overtime and lack of any protections from COVID-19 will continue.

During the latest Omicron surge, many workers fell ill. However, in complete contempt over protecting workers' lives, the TA contains no protections from COVID-19, no mask requirements, no vaccine requirements and no ventilation improvements.

The very first sentence of the TA is a disclaimer stating that the language workers are being asked to ratify will not be the final official version of the contract.

According to the disclaimer, "This edition of the APWU/USPS National Agreement is published unilaterally by the APWU to provide a reference for our members to use for deciding upon ratification of the Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreement and while the APWU and the USPS jointly develop the official version of the National Agreement." It further states that modifications may include "changes to the pay schedule" and the tier system's "ongoing conversion of certain PSEs."

The TA thus denies workers the right to approve the actual contract language. As workers know, the devil is often in the details. Indeed, ratifying the "unilateral reference" as it stands means handing a blank check over to USPS and the APWU to adjust certain terms as suits management's interests.

With its lobbying for the Postal Reform Act, the APWU has two objectives: first, to divert workers' attention from the terms of the TA and second, to stampede workers into supporting this regressive legislation.

APWU officials have a direct financial stake in this since the Reform Act will hand over control of a much-reduced retiree health care fund to the union. As was the case with autoworkers, the union is being given control of a lucrative multibillion dollar investment

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vehicle and tasked with imposing the necessary cuts on retirees to keep it solvent.

Further, health care premiums may rise above the rate of inflation because the new and separate Postal Workers Healthcare Retirement Fund activated by the Postal Reform Act will be smaller and therefore less cost efficient than the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) which insures workers now.

The APWU and other postal unions are campaigning heavily for the passage of the Postal Service Reform Act. APWU President Mark Diamondstein hailed the House vote for the Postal Reform Act in glowing terms, praising the cost reductions which he said would save "the Post Office billions of dollars each year." However, he said nothing about the attacks on workers.

The fact that both Democratic and Republican Representatives support the bill indicates that the "reforms" it contains are reactionary measures aimed at gutting workers' benefits and job security, increasing exploitation, and paving the way for the privatization of the USPS in the interests of profit.

While the bill would repeal the hated Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006, part of the "reforms" includes the combining of retiree health care benefits with Medicare. This would remove postal employees from the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, potentially raising premiums for other federal workers. DeJoy boasts that this will save $57 billion over the next decade.

The 2006 law required the USPS to pre-fund postal workers' retirement benefits 75 years in advance. This was designed to sabotage the Postal Service and serve as the justification for cost-cutting and job reductions and prepare for a private takeover.

Not a penny of the USPS pre-funding payments ever went to the postal workers' health care fund. The payments were instead delivered to the U.S. Treasury, where they were counted toward reducing the national debt. In 2012, USPS said the pre-funding costs were unsustainable and stopped paying them. However, the legal obligation remained, so debt was added to USPS books, which grew every year. Current estimates of USPS debt are reported around $160 billion with an estimated $120 billion of this obligated to pre-fund postal workers' retirement health care.

The Postal Reform Act will not only repeal the pre-funding but cancel the payments already made and debt accrued by USPS, money that is legally owed to future retirees.

The current bill seems to be a compromise between different factions over the speed of postal privatization, with Republicans generally wanting it to happen right away and Democrats opting for a somewhat slower pace to defuse opposition. However, the fundamental thrust of the bill remains unchanged.

Postal workers should mobilize now to defeat this sellout agreement. They cannot look to the APWU to defend their interests or the Democratic and Republican politicians seeking to dismantle the US Postal Service. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call on postal workers to build independent rank-and-file committees to mobilize their own independent strength.

These committees would oppose the dismantling of the post office and map out demands based on what workers need. This includes steep wage increases to keep up with inflation; fully funded pensions and health care benefits; the immediate conversion of temporary and part-time positions to secure full-time jobs; an end to the closure of facilities, workers' control over COVID-19 policies and other safety issues in the workplace. The US Postal Service must be fully funded as a public service and paid for through expropriating the wealth of the billionaires. This will only be possible through a struggle against the profit system, linking the fight of postal workers with broader sections of the working class in the US and globally, including workers at Amazon and UPS.

Postal workers interested in learning more about rank-and-file committees should contact the WSWS and share your comments on the APWU tentative agreement and the Postal Reform Act.

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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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