

APWU postal union claims contract ratification despite widespread ballot problems

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Are you a postal worker? Tell us what you think of the contract “ratification.” Comments will be published anonymously.

On February 28, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) declared that its tentative agreement with the United States Postal Service (USPS) was ratified, despite many workers stating they had not even received their ballots yet. The APWU is the largest of the four postal unions, covering workers in clerk, maintenance, and support services divisions.

Only 18 percent, or 36,032 of 200,000 APWU members, voted to ratify the 2021–2024 Tentative Agreement (TA) with the USPS, according to the official count released by the union, with 2,290 reportedly voting against.

The outcry among workers over failure to receive ballots in time to return them was so intense that the APWU was forced to delay the initial voting deadline from February 23 at 9 a.m. to February 28 at 5 p.m. The exact count of how many workers had still not received ballots at that late date has not been disclosed by the APWU, however, and it is not clear how many were even informed of the extension.

Moreover, the copy of the proposed agreement released by the APWU on February 7—a full two months after a deal was first announced—included a disclaimer stating that the union was still developing the “official” version of the agreement with the Postal Service. Given this fact and the widespread problems with balloting, no legitimacy can be given to the claims of ratification by the APWU.

A postal worker in the Twin Cities in Minnesota had not even heard that the contract had been ratified when contacted about it by the *World Socialist Web Site*, saying, “That’s news to me. It seems like they really wanted to push that baby through.” Asked about reports of ballots being delayed or not received, he replied, “I haven’t received one yet either.”

Many workers were opposed to the agreement, he said. “Everyone I’ve talked to was not happy about the contract,

in fact I was just having a conversation about it with a coworker who’s been around for a while, and he was pretty irate.”

The APWU’s announcement that the TA was ratified was also met with widespread hostility on Facebook, with a number of workers pointing to problems with balloting. “Most ppl didn’t even get a ballot—I seen a few come through at the plant but I didn’t even get mine,” one wrote. Another commented, “I just received my ballot today,” i.e., the same day ratification was announced.

Summing up the feelings of many, a third wrote, “This contract is a joke, obviously all the votes were not counted.”

The contract is yet another attack on postal workers’ wages and working conditions. As has become increasingly common throughout the US economy and beyond, the agreement maintains a divisive wage and benefit tier structure, dividing workers between those dubbed “career” and those categorized as “postal support employees” (PSEs), who are lower-paid and have fewer benefits, but who perform the same job duties.

The agreement included only an insulting 1.3 percent general wage increase for first-tier “career” employees. While these workers receive a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), it is often inadequate to actually keep pace with inflation, and compensates for only a fraction of the government’s Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), which measured 8.2 percent in January.

PSEs, meanwhile, will not receive COLA, and instead only a 2.3 percent general wage increase, plus a one-time \$.50 raise—a massive cut in real wages with inflation taken into account. At the same time, the contract expanded USPS’ ability to circumvent a 20 percent District-level cap on the number of PSEs employed.

The contract includes no serious protections for postal workers against COVID-19. There are no provisions for systematic surveillance testing, contact tracing, the required

use of N95 or better masks, or necessary improvements to ventilation at all postal facilities.

The contract aligns with the predatory 10-year cost-cutting plan of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a holdover from the Trump administration. The agreement includes no protections for 18 or more processing plants targeted for closures or re-purposing. Moreover, the despised tier system of non-career employees has been expanded to staff DeJoy's 46 and counting package annex facilities.

DeJoy, the APWU, and the Democrats and Republicans dearly want to undermine contractual health care provisions as they scramble to pass the Postal Reform Act. The Act would give away nearly \$200 billion in USPS retirement health care pre-funding obligations owed under the Postal Accountability and Enhancement law passed in 2006, threatening the bankruptcy of the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund (PSRHBFF), the health care fund for half a million retirees.

The Postal Reform Act would also undermine the health care funding for half a million active, career postal workers, making the Postal Service a more attractive, profitable target for privatization and takeover—a long-term objective of both Republican and Democratic administrations. At the same time, it would hand the APWU control of a much-reduced retiree health fund, placing the union directly in charge of slashing benefits for retirees while developing new income streams for the bureaucracy, similar to the United Auto Workers' attacks on retiree health benefits.

Biden and the APWU have worked closely to ensure that Louis DeJoy has an unlimited future as postmaster general. He was given that on January 12. By unanimous vote, Republican Trump-appointee Ramon Martinez IV was elected chairman of the board of governors, while Anton Hajjar, former general counsel for the APWU, was elected vice-chairman to back up Martinez and DeJoy. The new USPS board supports DeJoy and his plan to slow down postal delivery and undermine postal infrastructure.

Despite occasional critical posturing by the White House over DeJoy's blatant attacks on USPS, Biden has made sure that he will remain in place as postmaster general. The Hill, pointing to Biden's recent nominations to USPS' board, reported in late January that the president had "sent a clear message" that "major change is out, and Trump fundraiser Louis DeJoy can stay as postmaster general for the next few years."

Approximately 132,000 highly exploited rural letter carriers are now meeting and getting ready to vote on a TA which was announced on January 7 and is as bad or worse than the APWU deal.

All the postal unions support the Postal Reform Act of 2022, which appears to be on track to pass the Senate in the

coming weeks. The National Rural Letter Carriers Association union issued a press release on January 13 in which NRLC President Ronnie Stutts congratulated new board officers Martinez and Hajjar on their election and commended Martinez for supporting DeJoy and the 10-year plan.

The necessary conclusions must be drawn from these experiences. What are falsely called "trade unions" today have long since been transformed into instruments of the corporations and the capitalist state. It is precisely for this reason that they are being promoted by the Biden administration, the Democratic Party and their affiliated corporate media.

The US is mired in deepening crisis, with Washington and its NATO allies on the war march against Russia, explosive anger building in the working class over surging prices, and the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to kill over 1,500 a day. Under these conditions, the union bureaucracies are being deployed as a labor police force, tasked with suppressing resistance, forcing through concessions and disciplining the working class in preparation for war. Just days after meeting with Biden last month, the United Steelworkers announced a tentative agreement for 30,000 oil and petrochemical workers, despite overwhelming sentiment for a national strike.

But even as workers are deprived of any official outlet to express their discontent, opposition and anger are nevertheless building up explosively.

The urgent task is to build rank-and-file committees of postal workers as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to take the struggle out of the hands of the APWU and other postal unions, in order to organize a fight for major wage increases, fully funded pensions and retiree health care, safe and decent working conditions, and all the other rights of the working class. We urge all those agree to fill out the form below to discuss forming a rank-and-file committee today:



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