

USPS rural letter carriers suffering devastating cuts under new contract

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Are you a rural letter carrier? Tell us what you think about the massive pay cuts under RRECS and what you think ought to be done about it. All submissions will remain anonymous.

The National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA), the union that covers 132,000 United States Postal Service (USPS) rural letter carriers, negotiated the Rural Route Evaluation Compensation System (RRECS) as part of last year's contract with Trump-appointed Postmaster Louis DeJoy and the Biden administration.

The RRECS is an intricate, unclear and complicated formula to evaluate carriers' routes as the basis of their compensation. The draconian result, one year after it was negotiated, has caused massive pay cuts combined with barbaric forced labor increases for 90,000 of the rural carriers.

Unlike city carriers, who are paid hourly and are guaranteed eight hours daily, rural carriers are paid on what is called an "evaluated" system, under which each type of mail has varying amounts of time assigned based on the assessed difficulty of delivery. RRECS shifted what was previously a manual count of this mail, immediately visible to the carrier in the delivery unit, to an opaque electronic calculation.

Traditionally, the evaluated hours could shift by a few hours every year or two. The result of the new RRECS count, imposed on carriers on May 6, proved to be drastically in the USPS's favor.

Rural carriers in every office were stunned and outraged when breathtaking pay slashes, determined by the 52-week RRECS route evaluations were announced. They were initially set to go into effect on April 22.

At least two carrier protest actions have been held since then. The first was smothered with threats to workers' jobs, and authorities issuing dispersal orders according to workers. The second one was recently held in Arlington, Texas.

One rural carrier who supported strike action, referring to friends who are United Parcel (UPS) workers, told the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), "[they] are preparing for a STRIKE. I wish we as postal workers would strike, but there are too many scared people to make an unofficial strike work. We need everyone to participate, and the ones who had route time increases aren't willing to."

The RRECS system was developed jointly by the union and the USPS in response to a 2012 arbitration decision. The decision states that "the NRLCA first proposed and the USPS later agreed to re-do the evaluated compensation system based on sound engineering principles." The NRLCA and USPS stood together in calling for a completely revised compensation system "based on industrial engineering principles" and "modern electronic monitoring technologies."

In early April, a rural carrier posted on Reddit, "I'm a postal worker. I took a 25% pay cut today. Help me spread the word!"

"I'm a United States Postal Service mail carrier. New rules in place regarding pay has caused my pay to decrease by about 25% starting next Saturday. My pay is going from roughly \$65,000 to \$47,000. It's a real shame that in today's economy the postal service is allowing this to happen. I can hardly make an honest living working for the government! Almost every carrier in my office is also receiving a pay cut. Anywhere from 5-30%. Absolutely no one got an increase in pay. Something needs to be done about this. ... Talk to your friends and family about this issue."

There were 2,300 replies to this post, according to Reddit.

A letter was sent by six US Senators calling for postponing the implementation of the pay cuts. Citing RRECS, they wrote that the system "will reduce the pay of 66 percent of carriers significantly, and for nearly

14,000 carriers, those cuts will exceed eight hours of pay a week.” As a result, USPS and the union agreed to delay the pay cuts by an insulting two weeks from April 22 to May 6. But USPS and the union were adamant that the process was ironclad and must continue, because it was negotiated by USPS and their NRLCA bureaucracy co-conspirators.

To quell the rising tide of rebellion among rural letter carriers facing these devastating cuts with forced labor added, USPS and the NRLCA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on May 16th, setting out a lengthy Alternative Dispute procedure that bypasses the grievance process and workers’ right to representation under it. Foregoing a “Step 4” national grievance previously pursued on disputes of this scale, the Alternative Dispute procedure forces each individual carrier on their own to go through the laborious process of filling out a Dispute form.

The MOU “agrees that carriers may dispute the following,” and 9 categories are spelled out from “An entry of zero (0) or a questionable number in any data field on PS Form 4241-A that would otherwise expect to have a time credit; Office Walk; Route Length; Regular, Centralized or Total Boxes; Daily Dismounts; Daily Dismount Dist.; Daily Activities; Miscellaneous time; and Option Election.”

A rural carrier must fill out Evaluation Dispute Form 1 with the concurrence of the local management representative. Upon completion of this form with annotations and relevant documents included, the Alternative Dispute Form must be forwarded to the “Manager, Labor Relations at the district and the NRLCA District Representative. If the entire office has the same dispute, one form should be competed for the whole office.” Then they deliver the knockout punch: “This form must be submitted no later than May 31, 2023.”

If the local district USPS and NRLCA officials agree, the form gets passed up to several more levels of postal and union bureaucracy to restore whatever amount of the pay cut can be proven under the RRECS rules. This involves using the data collected for a year about numerous aspects of the route. Meanwhile the Post Office is doing everything in its power to not release that data.

Rural letter carriers have two bitter enemies—the USPS and the NRLCA bureaucracy, who have been co-conspirators against rural carriers every step of the way.

This system has clearly been designed to be as opaque and convoluted as possible. Combined with the lack of access to the raw data on which the evaluations are based,

the RRECS makes it virtually impossible for the workers to effectively dispute the resulting cuts in compensation.

One carrier who filed a grievance said that cutting pay and doing away with days off is unacceptable, “Why are USPS employees always expected to work for free? What other group in America is treated like this? It is a known fact that there are problems with RRECS and that some of the data used to evaluate our pay is downright wrong, incomplete or missing, but here we are being paid based on it anyway. Rural carriers pay is not your ‘line of credit.’ We want to be paid NOW for the work we are performing—not later.

“We also don’t want to rearrange our lives because we now have to suddenly work our days off because of a compensation system that has figured out our work hours incorrectly. There are people who have other jobs on their scheduled days off. Family members to look after, kids to take to appointments, etc.”

The attacks faced by the rural letter carriers are part of the overall, decades-long drive by both Republican and Democratic administrations to privatize the postal service, under Postmaster DeJoy’s 10 year plan “Delivering for America.” The Postal Reform Act of 2022 robbed postal workers of \$200 billion in retirement pre-funded health care to eliminate the USPS debt over the previous 15 years, balance the books and give what DeJoy claims as \$40 billion in capital for his mega center restructuring called Sorting and Delivering Centers.

This attack on postal service in the US is part of a worldwide trend with disastrous consequences for both service to the public and to postal workers, as is currently playing out in the UK .

Clearly, postal workers can put no confidence whatsoever in the trade union bureaucracy who have collaborated with the government in the attacks on those they supposedly represent. The new mechanism for determining compensation that has been foisted on the rural letter carriers by this cabal is irretrievably rigged against them. It must be rejected entirely.

As a first step, workers must form their own, independent, worker-controlled rank-and-file committees to lead the resistance against these intolerable conditions.



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