

Attacks on rural letter carriers the beginning of devastating restructuring of the US Postal Service

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Work at USPS? Tell us what you think about the impact of RRECS and the proposed cuts under “Delivering for America.” All submissions will be kept anonymous.

More than 90,000 rural letter carriers for the United States Postal Service (USPS) are battling changes to their compensation which have led to massive pay cuts and longer workweeks.

The replacement of the pre-existing method of calculating rural carriers’ hours and wages has resulted in wage cuts as high as \$20,000 a year in some cases. Rural carriers’ attempts to challenge and prove any discrepancies between their actual work and what is calculated by the new system have been derailed by the USPS’s refusal to disclose the year-long electronic collection of data used by the system which they alone control.

One rural carrier told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The [post office] should be punished criminally for stealing from people, because I know my evaluation isn’t correct but, like everyone else, I am unable to prove it because they won’t give me the information.”

The new system has lowered compensation for 66 percent of the rural carrier workforce by reducing the statutory time it takes for them to cover their routes. To add insult to injury, the 28 percent whose hours were increased are finding that glitches in the system are preventing them from getting paid the raises that the new system says they are owed. A rural carrier in Eastern Washington the WSWS spoke with stated her hours increased from 43 to 48 on a five day a week, or K, route, but her postmaster claimed a “glitch” was preventing her from getting that increase.

The new “modern engineered” Rural Route Evaluation Compensation System (RRECS) is part of a massive 10-year cost-cutting plan known as “Delivering for America” being carried out by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a Trump appointee. It was negotiated into the rural letter carriers’ contract by the union, the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA), a year ago.

Additionally, the NRLCA and USPS have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) creating, in parallel to

the existing grievance system, an alternative “Dispute Resolution Process” that foists responsibility for challenging lost hours and days off entirely onto the individual carriers. This was signed into existence on May 15.

The role of the NRLCA has been to deprive carriers of any way to fight these attacks. Rank-and-file rural carriers need to form Rank-and-File committees at every workplace to expose the impact of the RRECS and organize a fight against it, as well as the union apparatus who worked with USPS to perpetrate this gigantic fraud.

In a further effort to cut expenses, the USPS has been preparing a round of layoff notices. Workers will be given the opportunity to find another USPS job at the same or lower level by September 8 in order to avoid being laid off on September 9. Most of the jobs targeted so far are white collar workers in management departments, like the logistics division, according to USPS Labor Relations Director James Lloyd. But other targeted job classifications were listed in a USPS letter to the National Association of Postal Supervisors. They included operations and industrial engineers, transportation managers, operations support specialists and network specialists.

DeJoy has told the four postal unions that his “Delivering for America” plan is intended to re-make USPS in the image of UPS, Fedex, or Amazon. Behind the scenes, its ultimate goal is the privatization of the post office, the biggest mail and package delivery service on the continent, leading inevitably to further degradation of service.

The postal unions are perfectly willing to go along, provided that they are “at the table” in designing the transformation of their members’ jobs to lower paid, less secure work under worse working conditions. The postal unions were informed about this at least a year ago, and have kept this a little known secret and away from the membership.

The new plan will result in the loss of 50,000 jobs, DeJoy has said. The 280,000 rural and city letter carriers will have their lives substantially disrupted through route changes, affecting 100,000 letter carriers to start with.

USPS management is then planning to transform the postal sort and delivery system—now based in city, town and

municipal post offices, supplemented by hundreds of larger distribution centers scattered around the country according to population needs—into a spoke and wheel operation. A year ago, DeJoy said this meant the consolidated and potential closing of 10,000 post offices. Later he reduced that to a still-substantial 6,000 or 7,000 post offices.

DeJoy described his newest timetable for some of these events in his keynote address to the May 24 Postal Forum. He confirmed, “The biggest initiative, and one that will address a condition that has driven high cost and restricted performance, is the redesign of our national processing network and the operating practices we deploy to use it.”

He criticized, “This process [that] created a national processing network of over 425 facilities randomly plopped together over the last 15 years. And I did use a technical term... ‘plopped!’” DeJoy stated, “they are ready to roll with over 30 facility openings in the coming year.

“Our network will include 60 Regional Processing and Distribution Centers of adequate size and capacity to handle all volume transported into and out of each specified region. Approximately 45 of these facilities will be in existing postal facilities ... We plan 15 new facilities in areas of the country that have experienced expansive growth.”

DeJoy went on: “We will combine randomly deployed annexes, and some outsourced functions, into these Regional Centers to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness. These Regional Processing Centers will connect to approximately 220 Local Processing Centers (or LPCs) strategically located within each RPDC territory. These Local Processing Centers are postal facilities that already exist. They too will be redesigned to focus on the destinating operating requirements for mail processing and will serve as transfer hubs to our delivery centers.

“In total, this will be a reduction of approximately 200 small and wasteful accessorial functional locations in our system. This is not a consolidation! It is an aggregation of randomly deployed functionality spread out across a local area because of ill-planned deployment.”

In justifying the need for cost cutting against the rural and city letter carriers, he said, “The United States Postal Service ... operates over 250,000 carrier routes reaching 165 million delivery points 6 days a week. We connect planes to sleds in Alaska. We connect trucks to donkeys in Arizona and we connect boats to bicycles in Florida, to perform our service to the American people. While this delivery system is spectacular, it is also the costliest part of our business, making up over 50 percent of our operating budget.”

He concluded with the ominous statement, “Like our national network, our Retail and Delivery network requires change. Rapidly!”

Totally indifferent to the brutal and deep pay cuts under RRECS which were already well advanced by the time he was keynoting the Postal Forum, DeJoy launched a full-scale attack

on letter carriers, implying that they are being overpaid for major delivery work reductions that have occurred on their “unadjusted” routes. DeJoy ranted, “We have carrier routes that have not been adjusted in years, even though significant changes in mail volume, mail profile and residential development have been incessant. We have maintained our old “mail only” delivery strategies, diluting our magnificence by dividing up our carrier routes to over 19,000 locations.”

The attack on US postal workers is part of a broader attack on workers in logistics and supply chains in general, being carried out with the critical support of the trade union bureaucracy.

On the US railroads, in the name of “efficiency,” management has implemented “precision scheduled railroading” which has led to massive levels of overwork and driven the physical infrastructure of the rails to the brink of collapse, while also surging profits to record levels. When workers voted last year to strike against this, the response of the rail unions was to try to ram through a pro-company contract brokered by the White House. When this failed, they stalled for time in order to enable Washington to pass an anti-strike law.

At UPS, the largest unionized private employer in the US with 340,000 workers, the Teamsters are concealing behind public bluster the massive concessions being worked out with the company, which is demanding the creation of new tiers and continuing poverty wages for part-time warehouse workers.

This is also taking place around the world. After a series of limited strikes in Britain last year at Royal Mail, the Communication Workers Union has announced a sellout contract. It has subjected voting to months of delays in order to try to bleed off workers’ momentum against the contract.

But this is also producing a response from workers, who are organizing resistance to the bureaucracy through rank-and-file committees. Committees around the world are united with each other through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. USPS workers must form a rank-and-file committee of their own to fight against massive job and wage cuts, to unite different sections of the workforce separated into different mail unions and to open up lines of communication with postal workers in Britain and other countries.



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