

Rural letter carrier in the US discusses management attack on workers' conditions: "People need to know that they have a voice"

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On May 6, tens of thousands of rural carriers, who deliver mail for the United States Postal Service in rural, suburban and small towns, were put under a new pay system, which has led to arguably the greatest wage theft in US history. The Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS), designed as a new system to measure the amount of time required by carriers to deliver mail for each route, has massively reduced pay for two-thirds of 80,000 rural routes.

The cuts to rural carriers' wages are part of a vast restructuring of the Post Office under Postmaster Louis DeJoy, who intends to close thousands of local post offices and lay off 50,000 employees to transform the public corporation into a profitable Amazon-style delivery system.

Unlike city carriers, who are paid for every hour they are on the clock, rural carriers are effectively paid by piece work based on the size of their route, under what is called an "evaluated system." Prior to RRECS, the size of a route was determined through a laborious manual "count" within each delivery facility, in which every piece of mail, every parcel, every step was counted, measured and timed. RRECS, first proposed by the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA) union in 2012 contract arbitration, was presented as a way to place the count on a firm "engineering standard," using scanners into which values that had been counted by hand were input electronically.

Many carriers reported nonsensical entries into the system which are impossible to challenge.

In May, the union agreed to implement an "alternate dispute resolution process ... outside the formal grievance procedure" for RRECS. This "process"

placed the responsibility for pursuing a corrected evaluation on the individual carrier. It was predictably sabotaged by USPS. According to one carrier, "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."

A protest and march was organized in Washington D.C., not by the union, but by an individual rural carrier.

The *World Socialist Web Site* received numerous comments from rural letter carriers on several articles written about the situation. Recently, we spoke with a rural carrier from Washington state. To protect her from retaliation, her name has been changed for this interview.

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WSWS: *Would you tell us a little about your route and the impact which RRECS has had on you?*

Tina: I work in a small office and provide a vehicle to deliver my route. Some of the other routes use LLVs [USPS-provided vehicles], or what I call "rolling death boxes." My route is over 40 miles long and includes more than 500 houses. After RRECS, I went from a 45 K to 43 J [route classification]. That means that my pay dropped from around \$2,400 per pay period to about \$1,500. The RRECS pre-mini count gave me 45 hours in five days. Saturday was my normal day off, or overtime if I worked it. Going from a 45 K to a 43 J means that now I have to work every other Saturday—previously my day off—for two hours of pay less. After RRECS, I became the smallest route in the office.

WSWS: *The RRECS system introduced an entirely new way of evaluating rural routes. Could you tell us*

how you prepared?

Tina: RRECs training was up to us to read. The manual was online. They really didn't give us any training, that was left up to us. I downloaded about a 160-page manual and printed it out.

We would call the union with questions. At one point we had listed about 90 questions and answers. Fortunately, we had a Facebook group for RRECs. We were not paid for any of this [self-training] by the post office. There were six scans that we absolutely had to make daily, or we faced an investigative interview. But, there is no way to tell if we pressed the right button on the scanner. Our Manager of Post Office Operations (MPOO) threatened us with discipline for missing scans, yet they give us no way to see for ourselves if we had already scanned.

WSWS: *Many carriers complain about the conditions inside the delivery facility. Could you talk about that?*

Tina: DeJoy has benefited financially, and the workers risk their lives driving old poorly maintained vehicles, risk getting shot at or robbed for their mail or dying of heat stroke. It is absolutely a joke. Then they use the most ridiculous closing line to so-called safety stand-up meetings: "Safety depends on me." Yeah, put the responsibility on the overworked, underpaid worker.

With the hostile work environment, we had one postmaster with so many reprimands that she was reassigned to another facility but then was brought back when things cooled down. We have three clerks in our office, and the PTF [part-time flexible clerk] busts her butt working. She just gets treated so horribly and then was told that she had to go. Their union seemed to do nothing about it.

It's so frustrating. As a mail carrier, I take pride in my work. I do like my job. But there was a [postal worker] suicide on the East Coast, and there is a reason postal carriers go postal. Our manager is a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

WSWS: *Would you tell us your thoughts about the union, the National Rural Letter Carriers Association?*

Tina: We don't feel the union is working for us anymore. We actually found them in the office together [the union steward and management], and the union said there was nothing we could do about the RRECS results. Conditions are so bad; we can't get subs, it's just insane. As rural carriers, we have a contract, and I

was told our contract was null and void with RRECS, according to my district rep. So much for a contract!

WSWS: *The union initially filed a Step 4 national grievance against the RRECS results. What is going on with that grievance?*

Tina: We are not sure where they are on the grievance. They haven't said anything.

WSWS: *The World Socialist Web Site is calling on postal workers to build rank-and-file committees in order to unite and organize postal workers across crafts, uniting logistics workers across industries in a genuine struggle. What are your thoughts?*

Tina: I'm absolutely for a committee. I don't engage with the union. I called the union, and he said our contract was "out the window." I read your article, and I was on fire. I think we should be able to strike. Everyone in our office has talked about walking out. People need to know that they have a voice.



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