

“Oppose the system designed to steal our wages”: US Postal Service workers found rank-and-file committee

USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee
10 September 2023

The following is the founding statement of the USPS Rank-and-File Committee, which was established in a meeting held September 3 to organize a fight against the Postal Service’s attack on jobs and wages, and the collusion of the postal unions bureaucracy. To join the committee, or for more information, email USPSRankandFileCommittee@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.

Fellow USPS workers,

Rural letter carriers have seen their wages plummet under the Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS), city carriers are working without a contract, and mail handlers, clerks and other crafts see their jobs threatened as US Postmaster General Louis DeJoy’s “Deliver for America” plan aims to close a third of post offices in the coming years.

Within weeks of implementing RRECS in May, the majority of rural carriers reported a marked decline in wages, in many cases between \$10,000-20,000 per worker. Six US senators wrote DeJoy to say that 66 percent of rural carriers had seen their paychecks shrink, while at least 14,000 lost 20 percent or more of their wages.

RRECS is just the latest version of piecework compensation imposed on rural carriers, a system largely abandoned by other industries over half a century ago because of mass opposition by workers and their own acknowledgement that the system was inefficient and necessitated massive bureaucracies to administer.

Carriers have to keep records to compare against paystubs, they no longer manage their books, they have to force managers to sit down and edit them in software that does not recognize that buildings have multiple floors or that cluster boxes come in different sizes, and so on.

USPS has doubled down on piecework pay not despite its failings, but because of them. It is impossible to get paid for all the work you do, and even when you bring receipts, grievances can take months to resolve, if ever. This has led to massive, systematic wage theft over years.

Nevertheless, the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) has started accepting its own version of a hated pay-for-performance system, the Technology Integrated Alternative Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process (TIAREAP). Since 2022, city carriers have been tracked under this invasive surveillance system, which disciplines workers for “stationary events,” including delivering mail at cluster boxes or stopping to hydrate.

Just this June, a 36-year veteran carrier died of heat stroke in the 100-degree heat wave in Dallas, Texas. He had received the first disciplinary charge of his career through TIAREAP a month before.

Sorting and Delivering Centers (S&DCs) are being set up to centralize distribution into an Amazon-style hub-and-spoke model with the aim of shutting down post offices, hiring more gig-work casual employees, and ultimately privatizing USPS.

The trade union bureaucracies in NALC, NRLCA, APWU, and NPMHU are not our allies in this struggle. On the contrary, they have worked hand-in-glove with USPS management to introduce these policies and police us into implementing them. RRECS, TIAREAP, and the “Deliver for America” program were first negotiated undemocratically through Memoranda of Understanding with union bureaucrats and without input or approval from the rank and file.

The union officials have also overseen a jobs bloodbath and the ending of full pension and health care funding. Since 2000, more than a third of USPS career jobs, over 250,000, have been eliminated. DeJoy believes the cuts need to go deeper: “To get to break even, I think we need to get 50,000 people out of the organization,” he said.

The only way forward is to organize ourselves, put forward our own program of demands, and place rank-and-file workers in every position critical to our job security, safety, wages, bargaining and so on. We must prepare action from below to assert the will of 635,000 career and non-career USPS workers to make sure our needs and interests take absolute priority, and not the slash-and-burn policies of corporate-controlled politicians.

In founding the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, we are taking the first step in organizing that fight. We call upon our coworkers to join us and build up a powerful network linking rank-and-file workers at every station and distribution center across the United States. This broadly democratic structure, controlled by workers ourselves and not the union apparatus, will provide us with means to share information that is being withheld from us, to freely discuss strategy, and to coordinate joint actions across the country.

USPS is not Amazon

The US Postal Service was founded before the American Revolution, under the first Postmaster General Benjamin Franklin, as a strategic investment towards establishing the future nation. An infrastructure project as great as electrification or the highway system, the postal service has tied the population of the country and beyond together for centuries, enabling exploration, commerce and the transfer of knowledge.

Postal workers used to be proud to serve their customers and communities, delivering mail and packages where no private logistics company would go.

But successive Republican and Democratic administrations have underfunded USPS, transformed it from a cabinet-level agency into a quasi-independent outfit, gutted benefits and pushed it towards eventual

privatization.

DeJoy plans to reduce 19,000 post offices to 12,000 or 13,000 by consolidating them into Amazon-style S&DCs that will employ far fewer mail handlers, clerks and operators, and force carriers to drive much farther to collect mail.

Carriers are increasingly expected to drive their personal vehicles. Reimbursement rates barely cover fuel, let alone the vehicle depreciation caused by driving all-day routes in summer heat waves, potholed city streets or rocky rural roads.

United Parcel Service (UPS), a private “competitor,” has already transformed two-thirds of its workforce into part-time workers, many literally starving if they cannot find a second job. They also want to introduce gig workers, like Amazon “Flex” drivers, who will drive their personal vehicles, receive no benefits and have even fewer assurances on hours or job security.

This is the future USPS management has in mind for city and rural carriers, as well. NALC and NRLCA have allowed the mass-hiring of City Carrier Assistants and Rural Carrier Associates—essentially long-term second-tier workers—and even Assistant Rural Carriers, who have no prospect of converting to career positions.

Distribution center workers also have a great deal to be concerned about in the Amazonification of warehouse operations. The turnover rate at Amazon fulfillment centers is 150 percent! That is, on average, every worker quits, is replaced, and then half of their replacements quit—every year. Amazon’s repressive surveillance and speed-up policies have also led to twice the rate of injuries as the rest of the warehousing industry.

We stand with our brothers and sisters at UPS, Amazon, FedEx and other logistics companies, but we do not want to see the USPS “compete” with these private corporations in a race to the bottom. Nor do we want to replace the current unions with the corrupt Teamsters, who have led the charge towards casual employment and earlier this year abandoned 22,000 Yellow freight workers to bankruptcy without any protections—not even their last paychecks! This was followed by the sellout contract which condemns UPS workers to poverty wages and package delivery drivers to die in the heat.

A program to protect jobs and meet workers’ needs

The USPS Rank-and-File Committee Network bases its demands not on what Washington politicians and the multi-millionaire Louis DeJoy claim they can afford, but on what workers need to have a dignified standard of living.

Therefore, we put forward the following list of demands as the necessary basis for any new agreements across all postal crafts:

- Ending RRECS and other piecework systems, and back pay paid for all wages lost under RRECS.
- Ending TIAREAP and other demeaning surveillance systems.
- An immediate one-year 25 percent pay increase to make up for decades of wage theft and declining wages, as well as cost-of-living adjustments tied to inflation.
- Re-establishing the 8-hour day. Management cannot simultaneously claim there is insufficient mail volume to justify full pay and then assign multiple routes to city carriers and force them to clock out on time or force RCAs to work 12-hour days.
- A restructuring and investment plan that does not come at the expense of a single job and is overseen by the rank and file itself.
- Immediately provide air conditioning in all delivery vehicles and an end to the use of personal vehicles as an “alternative.”
- Formation of a grievances board in each region, staffed with trusted

rank-and-file workers elected from each station to fairly, confidentially and rapidly resolve outstanding disputes.

- Formation of safety committees in each region, staffed with trusted rank-and-file workers elected from each station, service and distribution center to set safety policies around delivery and operations, weather events, vehicle maintenance and so on.

- Full transparency in collective bargaining, including live-cast negotiations, distributing the full text of tentative agreements to all workers and electing a bargaining committee composed of trusted rank-and-file workers.

- Full funding for pensions and health care for all current workers and retirees.

- Elimination of long-term non-career positions, which function as a low-cost second tier to put wage pressure on all workers, and the conversion of all associates and assistants into full-time roles with full benefits.

- Professional training, paid by USPS and administered during paid hours, on all policies, systems and processes critical for safe job execution, compensation and so on.

The question workers face is not *if* but *how* these demands can be won.

The postal unions have for years repeated the lies that the USPS is bankrupt. In fact, from an operating budget standpoint, decreases in mail volumes have been mostly offset by contracts to deliver packages and even newspapers. The so-called \$120 billion debt was due to funding requirements for pensions and other post-employment benefits.

That is, the US government, following in the footsteps of private enterprise, has abandoned the social contract that states that after decades of hard, physically-demanding work, people deserve a comfortable retirement. These obligations can easily be funded by taxing the rich and reversing the decades-long assault on workers’ living standards.

But for decades Republican and Democratic administrations alike have underfunded the USPS, while they poured limitless sums into war and bail outs for the banks. DeJoy, meanwhile, is a mega-millionaire worth over \$100 million, who is leading the USPS not out of a newfound duty to public service but because his wealth is tied up in direct private shipping competitors. Biden has done nothing to replace this Trump appointee because he supports DeJoy’s plan for austerity and privatization.

Postal workers need to be clear that this is a political fight against both corporate-controlled parties over the allocation of society’s resources. Any program of demands that begins with the premise that workers have to continue working until they literally drop dead on the job is a non-starter.

To achieve our demands we must organize rank-and-file committees in every workplace and unify them coast to coast, across rural and city carriers, and across vehicle operators, technicians, clerks, mail handlers and all crafts.

City carriers are currently working without a contract. Rather than the old slogan, “No contract, no work,” NALC officials have strung out city letter carriers on a 60-day extension and then abandoned this red line. NALC is preparing another concessions contract that will inevitably introduce more of the hated surveillance and speed-up rural carriers face, while paving the way for DeJoy to eliminate tens of thousands more jobs.

We must unify now and prepare to strike. The public will be extremely sympathetic, as they were for rail workers last year before Congress voted to ban their strike and forced through a contract they had already rejected.

To avoid the same fate, we must make the broadest appeal to other workers. Delegations of rank-and-file workers should fan out to speak to dockworkers and autoworkers—where a contract for 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers expires on September 14—FedEx workers, Amazon and others. Strikes and workers’ protests are on the rise all over the world. We must also unite with our brothers and sisters across national boundaries, who have the same interests as us. A particular appeal should

be made to Royal Mail workers in Britain, who have formed the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee to fight a sellout contract there.

If you agree with this, join us! Contact the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing USPSRankandFileCommittee@gmail.com today.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact