

Department of Labor investigates payroll “glitch,” which left tens of thousands of postal workers without paychecks

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Are you a rural carrier who was affected by the September “payroll glitch”? Tell us about it by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The Department of Labor has opened an investigation into an alleged payroll “glitch” that caused 50,000 United States Postal Service (USPS) rural carriers to go without paychecks at the start of September. Some carriers report they still have not been paid, while others have received only partial payments. Still others are reporting they did not receive their September 15 paychecks either.

The National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA) notified its membership of the payroll issue on August 30th and informed them that affected carriers would be eligible for a salary advance of 65 percent of their pay, an approximation of their net pay. The advances were issued as money orders, and repayment of the advance is required as soon as affected carriers receive their back pay. A USPS spokesperson stated that only 68 percent of rural carriers have requested a salary advance.

The Wage and Hour Division of the DOL opened its investigation in mid-September after reports from carriers of continuing payroll issues. Despite the innocuous demands of Senators Tina Smith and Amy Klobuchar and Representative Angie Craig (all Democrats from Minnesota) to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to commit to paying the affected workers in full by October 1, some rural carriers are still attempting to recoup their lost wages.

On September 15, the second pay period of the month, a rural carrier in Maine who spoke to Federal News Network still had not received her September 1

paycheck. Another carrier reported his September 15 paycheck was short by 25 percent.

The NRLCA reported that most of those still impacted by the payroll “glitch” are “non-career” rural carriers, part-time employees who cover the routes of full-time carriers. Because part-time carriers may fill in on a number of different routes in a pay period, their payroll calculations take more time to process. On September 14, National Rural Letter Carriers Association National (NRLCA) President Don Maston complacently stated that some carriers may have to wait “another pay period or two” for back pay, depending on how complicated the adjustments are.

However, Maston was also forced to acknowledge what is common knowledge among rank-and-file carriers. “[E]very pay period, there are (payroll) issues that affect some carrier somewhere.” Under the current system, local postmasters and supervisors must manually enter various payroll codes and data into the payroll system, allowing for errors which force carriers to endure the payroll adjustment process to recoup lost wages.

Speaking to the Federal News Network, a carrier whose paycheck was shorted described the process all too familiar to mail carriers. “When trying to contact payroll, you are redirected to your supervisor. When you and your supervisor attempt to contact payroll together, the call is disconnected. The response from the supervisor is, there is nothing they can do.”

The fact that only 65 percent of workers requested a salary advance is indicative of the widespread mistrust by the rank and file of the ability of the USPS to pay its employees what they are owed and in a timely manner.

The carrier went on to explain why nearly a third of

affected workers chose not to take the salary advance offered by the USPS: “[I]n the past when this has happened, [they] have had nightmare issues with USPS taking the salary advance back from them out of their paychecks before ever giving them the corrected paycheck.”

Carriers who received a partial paycheck or no paycheck at all at the beginning of September continue to endure the consequences of unpaid rents and mortgages, utility bills and transportation costs, such as late fees and cancellation of services.

Rural carriers who use their own private vehicles to deliver mail were not reimbursed for their mileage as part of the salary advance offered by the USPS. According to NRLCA President Don Maston, the Equipment Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is not a “contractual right.”

A carrier in Texas told a local news station, “We did 100 percent work, so we need 100 percent of our checks. We rely on our own money to take care of our responsibilities, to get the mail and packages out. We work 10- to 12-hour shifts; we work six days a week. We only have one day off. And to not receive a check for working that hard. It’s hot outside. A lot of us are really in limbo—we don’t know how we’re going to make it.”

While there have been instances of individual rank-and-file workers choosing to stop work until they are paid in full, the NRLCA has done nothing to protect its members from the throes of going unpaid for weeks and even months. Union President Don Maston voiced the union’s steadfast capitulation to the continued assault on rural carriers’ pay in an interview reported by the Federal News Network, where he admitted that the payroll issues affecting rural carriers are longstanding and ongoing. He stated, “It’s only a matter of time before something happens again.”

What Maston refuses to acknowledge is that the NRLCA is conspiring with USPS against the rank and file in an attempt to force workers out of the postal service, as part Postmaster General DeJoy’s “Delivering for America” (DFA) plan to streamline the post office in preparation for its eventual privatization.

Last May, the Rural Route Evaluation Compensation System (RRECS), a collaboration between the NRLCA and the USPS, went online and immediately decimated rural carriers’ income. Two-thirds of the 132,000 rural

carriers suffered the loss of tens of thousands of dollars annually due to the convoluted pay-for-performance compensation system for which carriers received no formal training.

This context raises serious doubts as to whether the September miss payments were simply the result of a “glitch.” Whatever technical issues involved, it is clear that postal workers have been subjected to constant wage theft from the post office.

As the holiday season begins, the attacks on carrier pay and working conditions are sure to intensify as the number of packages to be delivered multiply exponentially. One carrier in Tennessee told the *World Socialist Web Site* that plans are in place to set up outdoor processing at his office to handle the package overflow during the holidays, forcing carriers to sort mail and load their vehicles outside in the winter.

Additionally, under the new RRECS system, carriers delivering more packages could be penalized because the RRECS system does not recognize that it is more time-consuming to deliver packages than mail. Nor does it take into account the physical toll the increase of packages has on rural carriers, who must exit their vehicles, unload the packages and carry them to the porches or front desks of the recipients.

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