

Rural Minnesota postal workers protest Amazon-USPS agreement forcing high workloads

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On November 13 and 14, postal workers in the town of Bemidji, Minnesota held informational pickets against overwork from a service agreement between the United States Postal Service (USPS) and Amazon. Rural mail carriers stood outside of the Bemidji Post Office before in the pre-dawn hours to demand additional staff to manage their workloads and better pay to make up for real wage cuts.

“Mail isn’t being delivered on many routes because we’re spending 12 hours a day just delivering Amazon packages,” Dennis Nelson, a veteran postal worker, told the local *Bemidji Pioneer*. “If you were to look [in the post office] right now, there’s probably five or six routes where mail wasn’t delivered yesterday because the packages had to go out.”

The agreement between Amazon and USPS, implemented in early November, prioritizes Amazon package delivery over regular mail. Already facing a staffing shortage, the letter carriers are now working extended hours—12-hour days, six days a week—with effectively no overtime pay. Rural routes are not paid hourly, but rather through a type of piece-rate system known as the Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS). When implemented earlier this year, it resulted in massive pay cut for the vast majority of rural carriers, in some cases of more than \$20,000 a year.

In addition, the additional workload from Amazon deliveries has led to delays in regular mail delivery, both workers and residents have said, impacting the distribution of essential items like legal documents and

bills. The implementation of the Amazon agreement, which initially started in larger cities, has been problematic in other locations too, with high staff turnover and unmet demands for additional support.

If the agreement with Amazon does instruct carriers to prioritize the corporate behemoth’s deliveries, it would represent a violation of federal law, which stipulates that the postal service shall not “make any undue or unreasonable discrimination among users of the mails, nor grant ... any undue or unreasonable preferences to any user [of the mails].”

In an anonymous post made on Facebook, a Bemidji postal worker described how the agreement has produced long hours and extreme working conditions preventing them from doing their job.

“A little over a week ago the [post office] in Bemidji took over from UPS the delivery of Amazon packages,” the worker wrote. “With our own work load (avg. of almost 600 mailbox deliveries a day) combined with the Amazon deliveries we are now being forced to work 12 hours a day and all days off have been rescinded by order of our District Manager.

“We were already at a critical low staffing level before the Amazon deliveries and we have lost several hard-working carriers over this issue. We now have several mail routes with no bodies to deliver them. District Management has informed us that Amazon Packages take priority and no matter how long it takes, every package will get delivered daily.

“This is gross incompetence by management. Neither the equipment nor personnel were in place to be able to effectively perform this mission.”

Pointing to the widespread staffing shortages at USPS, another postal worker in Minneapolis

commented, “I’m a mail carrier in the Nokomis neighborhood of Minneapolis and we are short staffed there as well. They have not even attempted to get us help for Christmas and packages take priority so many routes will go undelivered the closer the holidays get and the worse the weather gets.”

A growing number of post offices in cities throughout the US have been subjected to USPS’ service agreement with Amazon, which workers routinely indicate adds a crushing workload.

The protest in rural Minnesota is part of a growing wave of opposition among both postal workers and broader sections of the working class internationally, as workers seek to combat eroding wages and increasingly egregious working conditions and hours.

Among rural letter carriers, anger has been fueled by the newly implemented Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS). The RRECS is part of a vast restructuring plan, supported by both the Democratic and Republican Parties, which have the ultimate goal of transforming USPS into a privately run logistics company like Amazon, UPS and Fedex.

This is being carried out with the full collaboration of the main postal unions, including the National Association of Letter Carriers and the American Postal Workers Union, which have not lifted a finger to defend postal workers.

Postal workers are determined to fight the conditions they face, but they require organizations under their control in order to succeed. The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is working to link up workers throughout the postal system so that they can share information and coordinate their struggles.



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