US city letter carriers union holds national meeting in New Orleans amid months-long silence on contract talks

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During the National Association of Letter Carriers biennial national conference in New Orleans last month, NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said little or nothing about the state of contract negotiations with the United States Postal Service (USPS).

City letter carriers have been working without a new contract since May 2023. For the last six months, NALC officials have delayed bringing back any contract proposals, knowing full well that the rank and file would use the opportunity to massively oppose Delivering for America (DFA), the 10-year restructuring plan being implemented by Biden's Postmaster General Louis DeJoy with the collusion of the postal unions.

DeJoy's plan has already cut thousands of jobs as mail processing is being moved from local post offices into massive regional processing and delivery centers (RPDC). The postmaster general plans to cut 50,000 jobs and eliminate thousands of post offices.

Renfroe stated at the conference that preparations are well underway to begin binding interest arbitration, which would rob carriers of their democratic right to vote on their contract at all.

The bureaucrat had no sure gains to boast about in an agreement during the New Orleans conference, also known as a "rap session." Renfroe claimed the NALC and USPS are still divided over compensation. He said the fate of the "non-career workers"—the tens of thousands of low-paid temporary workers who make up 18 percent of USPS employees—was still to be determined, based on the compensation package that full-time workers would get.

Low wages and long hours have led to a high turnover rate for temporary workers, exacerbating the labor shortage and depriving full-time workers of any relief from exhausting schedules and burnout. Despite claims by the USPS that there is no staffing issue, carriers have told the *World Socialist Web Site* that they are working overtime everyday, many without a day off for weeks, to keep up with a massive increase in volume created by the USPS being the last-mile carrier for Amazon.

The union president stated that should the move to interest arbitration occur, the union is ready with a proposal that includes a single pay table, elimination of the pre-career category, and restoration of cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) to 100 percent starting at Step A. It is clear that whatever is in the proposal, the union does not want to risk putting it in front of rank-and-file workers where there is a strong demand for a substantial improvement of carriers' working conditions and opposition to Delivering for America (DFA).

Renfroe went on to announce the merger of 113 small NALC locals into larger locals to "improve representation" for those branches. In fact, the NALC apparatus is downsizing its operations in anticipation of massive job cuts while strengthening its bureaucratic grip to suppress any dissent. The consolidation will affect about 5 percent of the NALC locals.

Underscoring this, Renfroe told the audience of local union officials to ignore any information about reassignments resulting from the DFA consolidations from their branch managers. "If you're going to be impacted by one of these in any way, you will hear well in advance from your regional office and from us at headquarters to prepare for that," he told his subordinates.

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By controlling the narrative, the NALC bureaucracy hopes to preempt and isolate any local opposition from rank-and-file workers to the job cuts and prevent them from becoming a catalyst for a broader movement that the union apparatus would be unable to control.

As local mail processing moves from local branches to sorting and delivery centers (S&DC), carriers will pick up their mail at the S&DC. For tens of thousands of carriers, this will mean driving a greater distance just to get to and from work.

The NALC has worked arm in arm with the USPS in implementing some of the most grueling changes to carriers' working conditions. Renfroe proudly claims that the city carriers' new route evaluation system, TIAREAP, and the DSR route adjustment and GPS surveillance technology, was a collaboration between the USPS and the NALC.

This new surveillance and tracking system undoubtedly led to the death of 36-year veteran letter carrier Eugene Gates Jr. who died of heatstroke in Texas in July. The 66-year-old had a spotless record until he was disciplined for a "stationary event" by the new tracking system. A "stationary event" is noted anytime a carrier's tracker is idle. Disciplinary action against Gates most certainly caused him to push himself harder during the scorching days of a Texas summer leading to his death.

After only a year in office, a section of the NALC leadership is currently trying to remove Renfroe as president. The union has brought multiple charges against him, such as driving a union vehicle while impaired, misuse of union funds, and conduct that is described as unreliable, untruthful and shameful. But this is an internal conflict within the bureaucracy and anyone that would replace him from within the apparatus would offer nothing better.

There should be no question that Renfroe is working with the USPS to stall a new agreement with city carriers in order to force an undemocratic contract on them that will facilitate the rollout of Delivering for America.

Postal workers cannot allow their voices to be silenced. The union bureaucracies at NALC, the APWU or the NRLCA will do nothing to defend the rank and file from the grueling conditions imposed on them by new route evaluation systems and the Amazonification of the USPS under Delivering for America.

In order to be heard, postal workers must take matters into their own hands and form rank-and-file committees in their branches and join the network of logistics rank-and-file committees to fight for their democratic rights.

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