

At press conference, NALC president falsely claims no job cuts under restructuring of US Postal Service

Chase Lawrence, Tom Hall
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At a press conference last Thursday, National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) President Brian Renfroe falsely denied that mass job cuts are taking place as part of the United States Postal Service's Delivering for America (DFA) restructuring program.

The comments came in an exchange with WSWS reporter Tom Hall, who asked him to speak about the status of the contract talks. City carriers have been working without a new contract since last May.

The exchange took place after a rally at the Dallas Main Post office in Texas, devoted to the topic of rising cases of assault and theft against letter carriers. Robberies and thefts have increased by over 800 percent between 2019 and 2023, and letter carriers in Dallas-Ft. Worth area (DFW) have experienced eight robberies since the end of December, according to the union.

The "rally" consisted of around 30 blue-shirted mostly NALC union officials and lasted about 10 minutes. It was a stage-managed event, which had around equal numbers of media and demonstrators. The employee parking lot for the post office was at least half full with hundreds of cars, but few workers could be seen at the event, and most did not seem to be aware it was taking place.

The brief remarks by Renfroe and local NALC officials did not even mention the contract. Nor, even though the event was focused on worker safety, did it raise the death last year of Eugene Gates, a veteran Dallas letter carrier who died from heat complications.

When Hall asked about the tens of thousands of USPS jobs at stake, Renfroe claimed he was "not sure that's accurate. Certainly I'm no expert ... when it comes to jobs outside members that I represent, but I

can tell you for sure that that's not the case with the letter carriers I represent. Any reduction in general."

This is a patent falsehood, as Renfroe well knows. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy himself has explicitly said that tens of thousands of job cuts are on the agenda. "Right now, to get to break even, I think we may need to get 50,000 people out of the organization," he told a right-wing think tank in July of 2022.

The restructuring involves the closure of thousands of local post offices, the reconsolidation of the USPS delivery network around a small number of large, heavily automated hubs and the adjustment or elimination of 100,000 routes nationwide.

As the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee explained in a statement published last year, "DFA seeks to transform the USPS from a public service, which used to pay decent wages and pensions, into an entity beholden to shareholder profits, with a super-exploited, Amazon-style workforce."

This is not the first time that the NALC has covered for the Post Office and Delivering for America. In the August edition of its *Postal Record* magazine last year, the union claimed in its cover story: "There Will Be No Post Office Closures or Employee Layoffs as Part of Our S&DC Roll Outs."

The consolidations are already well advanced and have produced debacles in urban areas across the country, where residents have had to wait for weeks for their mail. One factor behind mail backups in Richmond, Virginia, during the last holiday season was the shift towards "Optimized Collections," where delivery units previously handled by local offices near sorting and delivery centers are now handled directly at the larger facility.

If Renfroe and the NALC are covering up the job cuts, it is because the union bureaucracy is helping to carry them out. It has already quietly extended a memorandum establishing an invasive monitoring program called TIAREAP, which is used to robotically discipline letter carriers.

The next contract, arguably the most significant in the history of the USPS, is being carried out behind closed doors. Workers have been left totally in the dark about the status of talks, even as they have been left on the job without a contract for most of a year.

Renfroe declined to give any details of the contract talks to the WSWs last week, “wouldn’t get into the details of our contract negotiations publicly.” He did, however, confirm that the union is moving towards binding interest arbitration. “We have not done any official announcement about that yet, but that is the next step, but we are still optimistic as is the Postal Service. I think that we can reach an agreement,” he said.

The effect of binding arbitration, which is mandatory for postal contracts under anti-worker labor laws, would be to cut out the membership from even the pretense of a vote. The NALC and the other postal unions loyally help to enforce such laws, which amount to a corporate dictatorship over workers, as a convenient pretext to claim there is nothing workers can do except to accept cuts.

In reality, postal workers, as with other sections of the working class, have been compelled to fight against repressive anti-labor laws, as well as against management. In 1970, postal workers carried out a national wildcat strike, the first by federal employees in US history, against President Nixon’s plan to spin off the Postal Department into an independent agency—which was accomplished the following year with the creation of the US Postal Service.

The agreement with the postal union officials to end the wildcat accepted the continuing ban on postal workers’ right to strike.

Renfroe’s comments are a serious warning that the union bureaucracy is collaborating with USPS to impose historic cuts. If workers are to defeat this, they must prepare to fight not just against management but the union bureaucracy and the anti-democratic labor law framework which they defend.



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