

Widespread wage theft persists as latest US Postal Service rural route evaluation begins

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Are you a rural letter carrier? Tell us how the latest mail count affected your pay by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Over 135,000 rural letter carriers are entering a two-week route evaluation period this week, which will determine compensation for the next six months. This “mail count” is the third since the Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS) was introduced in May 2023, which led to sharp wage reductions for two-thirds of rural carriers, often of \$10,000 or more.

Workers were patronizingly told by management and the rural carriers’ union to be patient during the initial implementation of RRECS. But after two subsequent route evaluations and massive numbers of grievances filed by workers, experiences confirm that the purpose of RRECS was to slash wages all along. This is part of the misnamed Delivering for America restructuring program, which is aimed at improving the post office’s profits by cutting tens of thousands of jobs and closing thousands of local post offices. This is being carried out with the collusion of the bureaucrats which run the postal unions.

The current mail count began Saturday, February 24. By Monday, letter carriers in Washington state, Georgia, Michigan, and elsewhere took to social media to report that they received no mail whatsoever to deliver, guaranteeing their routes would be undercounted. “No DPS [machine sorted letters] for half of Michigan. Mail was still at the plant as of 5am,” declared one carrier. “There must be a count going on,” said another sarcastically, pointing out how carriers are routinely cheated during route evaluations.

Lack of transparency

Rural carriers work under what is effectively a piece rate system, where their pay is calculated not by the number of hours they work but by the “value” of the routes they work. This is calculated on a vague system which, among other factors, involves the periodic mail counts. Every walk to a curb, door, or cluster box needs to be tracked and documented or else the carrier is not credited.

RRECS also shifted ownership of “edit books,” used for the detailed mapping of routes, from carriers to managers and

transformed how these calculations are reported.

Frank is a rural letter carrier out of New Mexico (his real identity has been changed to protect him from retaliation). He told the *World Socialist Web Site* about his painstaking efforts to recoup the \$10,000 in annual pay stolen from him when RRECS was introduced. Frank runs an “overburdened route” which had been designated as a 48K (which means it was estimated at 57+ hours per week), but which was demoted to one of the lowest designations, 43K, after the first mail count. The route lost a further hour after the second mail count in September. His union steward was astonished, as Frank carried one of the heaviest mail, magazine, and parcel volume routes in the state.

Frank, a veteran postal carrier, knew how to verify the data. He added up the minutes on his forms 4241A and 4241M and confirmed he should have been designated a 47K, much closer to his original route and salary. However, his dispute was hamstrung because USPS would not tell him the mail volumes they claim he runs.

Frank ran his questions up the chain, first contacting a district union rep. Next, Frank escalated to the national office of the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association (NRLCA). For weeks he left messages or spoke to assistants, finally receiving a call back from a national board member, who claimed that USPS’ forms were correct despite no one having access to the underlying data. The board member, exuding contempt for workers, then ranted, “It’s the carriers’ fault that we have not had any mail counts in the last 5 years, and now that mail volume is down, carriers are surprised that routes have gone down in pay.”

This lie that the post office is shrinking and workers have to tighten their belts is straight out of management talking points. The reality is that in the decade since RRECS was approved in 2012 and was slated to launch in 2022, USPS enjoyed unabated annual revenue growth from \$65 to nearly \$79 billion, as falling mail volumes were more than offset by a burgeoning parcel delivery business. During the same period, USPS shed almost 12,000 jobs.

Union betrayals, past and present

The USPS is covered by draconian, anti-democratic labor laws which ban strikes by federal employees. These laws have been in

effect for decades. The union bureaucracy has accepted these anti-worker laws for decades because it helps them to tamp down on rank-and-file opposition with the ready-made excuse that workers “can’t strike.” They lean heavily on them as a convenient pretext for enforcing sellout contracts and blocking struggles by postal workers.

As a matter of fact, hundreds of thousands of postal workers carried out a powerful wildcat strike in 1970, the first national strike by federal employees in US history. The unions sold out that struggle with an agreement which continued the blanket bans on strike action, paving the way for the liquidation of the Postal Department and its replacement with the United States Postal Service.

This was intended as the first step towards the post office’s eventual privatization, for which both parties have been campaigning for decades. Delivering for America is a major step towards this by making the post office more attractive to investors.

This is also not limited to the postal unions. The railroad industry is also governed by similar legislation, but even when the anti-strike provisions of the Railway Labor Act were exhausted in 2022, the unions lied, claiming that workers still “could not strike” after they voted down a contract brokered by the Biden Administration. They played a crucial role in buying time until after the midterm elections for Biden and Congress to preemptively ban a strike and impose the contract which workers rejected.

In a January 30 keynote to the National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors, DeJoy was invited to share how DFA is “shaking up” the post office. In a telling quote he said, “We’re all rowing in the same direction now” — that is, he has the backing of union bureaucrats and government regulators for his disastrous plan.

The city carriers’ union, the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), has approved its own surveillance system similar to RRECS. It is called the Technology Integrated Alternate Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process (TIAREAP) and was imposed through an undemocratic Memorandum of Understanding. The union secretly extended it months after their last contract expired in May 2023.

NALC is nearly 10 months past the expiration of its last contract. The talks with USPS management have been conducted through total silence, a clear sign that the union is preparing to help impose more concessions.

About 20 NALC bureaucrats staged a press event in Dallas, TX last week focusing on the increase in violent theft against carriers. Not one word was uttered about the contract until the Q&A, when a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter asked what the plan was and NALC president Brain Renfro confirmed they would move towards binding interest arbitration.

2024 is a critical year in the struggle against Delivering for America. NALC, NRLCA, and the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) all have contract negotiations coinciding this year. APWU bureaucrats host pointless, pro forma meetings and lie that not a single job will be cut even as hundreds are laid off when DFA restructuring hits their facilities. Worker anger is boiling over, and 16,000 rural carriers have even signed a petition

to decertify the union.

The fight to end DFA and defend jobs

Delivering for America is a far-reaching plan. Its key features include:

- ? Establishing regional, Amazon-style Sorting and Delivering Centers (S&DCs) to replace processing functions of local post offices and existing processing centers

- ? Routing carrier pick-up and drop-off to these S&DCs, causing routes to double in length on average, while carriers deliver less mail each and wages continue to plummet

- ? Driving up the cost of postal products at an unprecedented rate

- ? Shredding at least 50,000 more postal jobs, according to statements by DeJoy, as USPS introduces more automation

- ? Trampling or rescinding any federal regulations that get in the way, including mail service levels and fair access to postal services for all Americans

DFA is not only an attack on workers, but on the right to access to mail. The reason for these dramatic changes is *not* to shore up USPS budgets, as incessantly claimed. Its purpose is to privatize USPS.

To stop DFA, defend jobs and living standards, end the cruelty and abuse of management, and improve job safety, postal workers must organize rank-and-file committees at every station and processing center and link them up with their brothers and sisters in other industries in a common struggle.

This is the perspective of the USPS Rank-and-File Committee, which was formed last year as an alternative to the “labor-management collaboration” of the corrupt trade unions. In its founding statement, it demanded an immediate end to RRECS and the restoration of all lost wages, among other basic demands that should form the basis of contract negotiations this year.



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