

Letter from a retired US postal worker: One year since the heat-related death of Eugene Gates

A USPS retiree
21 June 2024

The World Socialist Web Site received the following letter from a retired postal worker from California. We are publishing it below, edited for clarity and length.

The anniversary of the death of Dallas letter carrier Eugene Gates is all the more relevant given the heat wave which is currently affecting much of the United States and the world. As always, workers are the ones being made to bear the brunt of the climate catastrophe. This includes being made to work through blistering heat with little or no protection.

If you or your coworkers are being forced to work in similar conditions, we want to hear from you. Fill out the form at the bottom of this article to tell your story. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

June 20 marked the one-year anniversary of the death of Eugene Gates Jr. He was an exemplary U.S. Postal Service letter carrier for 36 years until he died while delivering mail in Dallas, Texas last year.

He was 66 years old when he died of a heat stroke in over 110 degree heat while delivering his route. His wife Clara attested to his conscientious dedication to staying healthy and positive.

In just the weeks before, Gates had been issued a letter of discipline for “unacceptable performance—expanded street time.” The letter says that an investigative review found Gates was “in violation of postal rules and regulations” for not being productive every minute of his work day, and further threatened that “future deficiencies will result in more severe disciplinary actions, including removal from the Postal Service.”

This was the first discipline Gates received in his 36 years with USPS. It was the direct result of a contemptible program called TIAREAP that involves a scanner and GPS technology that tracks carriers for “stationary events.”

A little background on TIAREAP: It was adopted in two Memorandums of Understanding between the NALC and USPS on May 10, 2022 for the duration of 2022 and 2023

and was then extended to at least 2024. The scanner and GPS technology that is central to TIAREAP tracks every movement of city carriers during the work day in what is called Digital Street Review (DVR). It tracks every second of a carrier’s activity and subjects them to disciplinary charges for “stationary events” that are defined as any time when productivity is interrupted.

A union rep had been assigned to attend his hearing; however, the rep never disputed the alleged offense, which only served to reinforce the reality of the threat of further discipline and removal.

Eugene and his wife Clara were close and she attested to his dedication and reliability. He decided he didn’t want to stress his wife with his worries. But USPS was going in a new direction, with Postmaster DeJoy’s “Delivering For America” plan, which promised to displace 100,000 workers from their post offices in three years, and older workers, of which he was one, were being targeted.

TIAREAP (Technology Integrated Alternative Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process) is unquestionably largely responsible for the death of Eugene Gates Jr. It is also indicative of what is to come in the upcoming and long-overdue letter carrier contract. A carrier’s job is frequently difficult due to weather extremes, fluctuating mail volume, dogs, and now attacks on carriers, sometimes with guns.

The pay is not keeping up with inflation and the pending contract will doubtless be a nightmare created to promote and expedite the implementation of Postmaster Louis DeJoy’s DFA plan, which seeks to privatize the post office and turn it into a package-intensive operation which is designed to make him a filthy rich benefactor at the expense of the Postal Service and its employees.

Workers like Eugene Gates Jr. are compelled to work under unbearable duress so that the well-paid Postmaster Louis DeJoy can reassure stakeholders that their profits are insured. DeJoy earned (and I use the term loosely) a salary of \$305,681 and that doesn’t include perks or bonuses. The

imbalance of wealth in America continues to alarm.

In the end, OSHA proposed a \$15,625 fine against USPS. That's what a letter carrier's life is worth. We, the working class are devalued in a system that is designed not just to make profit from our labor for the big boys, but to bleed us dry for their selfish greedy gain. The life of a worker is expendable in the pursuit of profit.

Letter carriers' union responsible

I decided to submit a resolution to the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) regarding the Technology Integrated Alternative Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process (TIAREP). This new method of route evaluation involves invasive surveillance technology to speed up and discipline letter carriers. That's what killed Eugene Gates.

The process of submitting my resolution required me to first take it to my local branch for approval and then forward it to national in time to be included in the publication of proposed resolutions that would be distributed to the delegates at the national convention this August in Boston.

My resolution called for the members of the branch to mandate President Brian Renfroe to withdraw from this shameful agreement immediately and to further resolve that TIAREAP not be contained in the upcoming contract between the NALC and USPS.

After sending a copy to the branch office as required, I attended the monthly branch meeting by Zoom. The meeting dragged on for three hours without ever getting to new business. I was prevented from introducing my resolution as someone moved to adjourn as soon as it was my turn to speak.

I attended the next month and was met with overt hostility from the cabal that runs the meetings. Each time I raised my hand to get in the queue to speak, my hand was taken down. When I was finally recognized, I had only just read it when someone moved to adjourn.

The next month I decided to attend in person to avoid the shenanigans with Zoom. But when I got there the building was locked. They had emailed everyone to tell them the meeting would be 'Zoom only.' A friend forwarded the email. When I checked the cc: list, I saw everyone who ever attended a branch meeting had been contacted. Except me.

Their behaviors are childish and moronic. But I persist because I know their target is the truth and they can't stop that. The primary job of all unions bureaucrats is to keep a lid on the truth. While we are not privy to the big picture, we

are expected to play an integral role in fulfilling the work plans they have for us.

Rank-and-file committees the way forward

This is an age of rapid technological advances. We can't stop that, nor do we want to. But we need to make sure that we the working class benefit, not the oligarchs who own the means of production.

The Postal Service faces the reduction of jobs from automation. Auto workers are being deeply impacted by electric vehicles, which require fewer parts and, therefore, less labor. The abuse of AI threatens everyone.

People fought and died for the eight-hour work day. Now we need to fight for a shorter work day with full benefits. It is totally realizable if the inconceivable amount of wealth is taken from the likes of Musk, Bezos, Zuckerberg, Ellison, etc. and redistributed in an international socialist economy.

How? Rank-and-file committees, organized independently of the bureaucracy, will fight for it.

The UC student strike against the Gaza genocide strikes a powerful blow to not only the UC system but the whole government. Young people all over the world are rising up in defense of the Palestinians. Youth everywhere see there is no future in fascism and war but they are the ones expected to fight it. They're not going to do it.

Rank-and-file committees provide the perfect opportunity to come together quite readily all across America and around the world. As DeJoy implements the various parts of his DFA while the union keeps us deliberately in the dark, rank-and-file committees can share their information very readily through Zoom technology. Additionally, we can organize across unions to plan for a general strike.

Rank-and-file committees are already operating in several countries, including among postal workers.

It's time we seriously mobilized as a class to fight back. The Rank-and-File Committees are making their move. Don't be diverted by the union into a dead end promise of better times in the future. Act now to take back what is ours.

Go to wsws.org/workers and be connected. We owe it to ourselves. We owe it to the respectful and honorable memory of Eugene Gates Jr.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact