

US postal workers outraged after poverty contract announced for city letter carriers

Omri Wolfe

20 October 2024

Take up the fight against the sellout contract! Join the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing USPSRankandFileCommittee@gmail.com or filling out the form below.

After nearly two years of talks, the union for city letter carriers announced a poverty-level tentative agreement Saturday with the United States Postal Service, sparking a wave of outrage on social media.

According to a summary by National Association of Letter Carriers, the 42-month deal (2023 through 2026) contains pathetic 1.3 percent annual wage increases, in addition to substandard cost of living adjustments, continued hyper-exploitation and surveillance, and the continuation of a vast restructuring program aimed at privatizing USPS. NALC covers over 205,000 active and another 90,000 retired city letter carriers.

The wage proposal is especially provocative. After record-high inflation and other recent agreements for autoworkers, UPS and east coast dockworkers which all contained modest wage increases between 20 and 61 percent. Even these deals were sellouts, where wage increases acted as cover for mass, automation-driven job cuts.

Under this contract, however, workers will get *both* a near-wage freeze *and* massive job cuts. In fact, rural carriers covered under a separate contract are being systematically cheated out of salaries equal to \$10,000 and even \$20,000 a year in many cases, with the aim of driving many out of the post office entirely.

Meanwhile, even as workers face declining real wages and an expected 15 percent rise in healthcare premiums this year, NALC bureaucrats awarded themselves a nearly 20 percent raise, paid for out of workers' dues money.

Workers must reject this contract and prepare for an independent fight, uniting across crafts against the bureaucrats, USPS administrators and the pro-corporate parties. The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee founded last year, must be built as the alternative leadership to the NALC apparatus.

This is a "complete spit in the face," one worker wrote on

social media. "Couldn't be more insulting if they tried," another wrote. Another added: "After covid and being essential workers and waiting 500 plus days for a contract, we get no raise."

"600+ days of negotiating an 'historic' contract and it ends up being a pay cut?" One worker asked incredulously. "Embarrassed by my union." Another commented, "Almost 2 years of waiting for a 'historical contract'---it's historical in the sense that it's the worst contract to date!"

Others demanded the resignation of NALC president Brian Renfroe, and even called for a strike in opposition to the deal.

Hyper-exploitation and the race to the bottom

Massive overwork, wage cuts and automation-driven layoffs, which worker across the world confront, are particularly extreme at USPS.

Workers in NALC are already divided into tiers, with City Carrier Assistants (CCAs) lacking the wages, benefits, job security and worker protections of "regular" or career employees. USPS further employs Part-Time Flexible workers, Holiday Carrier Assistants, with wage "steps" that require career employees over a decade to reach their top salary potential.

The new TA removes the first three steps, reducing from 14 years to 11 years the time it takes to reach full salary, still twice the time it takes to top out at UPS. Even so, it did not accelerate those already beyond the first steps. This has angered workers who started three years ago during the peak of COVID deaths, supply chain crisis, and increased demand on postal services who will now make the same salary as new hires.

City carriers can be "mandated" to work 60-hour weeks before overtime protections come into force. Union bureaucrats negotiated the "opportunity" for carriers to

volunteer to work more than 60 hours per week or 12 hours per day, and that workers would automatically receive overtime pay, rather than having to file grievances, presenting these as supposed “victories.”

During the busiest package delivery season, between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, USPS has significantly reduced the traditional hiring of temporary workers and relied on the hyper-exploitation of its regular workforce. To avoid costly overtime fees, management and the union apparatus negotiated the Overtime Exclusion Period, when workers can be exploited without proper compensation. The new TA would extend overtime exclusions from 4 to 6 weeks.

Even demands to require air conditioning in vehicles are couched in vague terms and include various exceptions for management’s discretion. Carriers will discover like UPS drivers that these non-binding terms mean that most will not have access to air conditioning for years to come, if ever.

“Delivering for America” attacks to continue

The high point of the attack on postal workers is the “Delivering for America” restructuring program, which, according to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, aims to eliminate tens of thousands of jobs, close local post offices around the country and reorganize the post office’s operations along the lines of low-wage, high-tech Amazon.

DeJoy has paused the opening of new regional processing centers temporarily owing to the volume of complaints, due to lost mail and collapsed services, from American consumers in the first four regions where they were introduced. But the postal union bureaucrats are supporters of DFA, with Renfroe even lying to a WSWS reporter earlier this year when he claimed the plan did not entail job cuts.

A coordinated attack by USPS, NALC and the White House

The proposal is so regressive that it beggars belief that even NALC and USPS imagine it can be passed. One possible reason for bringing this proposal to a vote is to move quickly to binding arbitration after it is rejected. Under extreme anti-worker labor law, postal workers are not allowed to strike, and the rejection of “voluntary” agreements lead instead to deals imposed on workers.

However, in 1970 postal workers carried out a massive wildcat strike in defiance of these laws which was only brought under control through a deal worked out with the union bureaucracy.

Whatever the case may be, the contract is no doubt the product of intense involvement with top White House officials. It is highly significant that the announcement of the NALC contract came the same day that the International Association of Machinists announced a new deal at Boeing, where 33,000 workers have been on strike for more than a month. That contract contains wage increases below workers’ demands, does not restore pensions stolen in a 2014 contract extension and paves the way for massive job cuts. Even during the strike, Boeing announced it would cut 10 percent of its global workforce, or 17,000 people.

The deal was brokered by acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, who also intervened to shut down a strike on the docks.

A decision has been made at the highest levels of the government, and enforced through the union bureaucracy, to end the wave of strikes and opposition in the working class. Washington is preparing to launch a massive new war with Iran, as well as escalate the conflict with Russia, and it must get the “home front” in order and secure crucial supply chains. The military significance with which the White House views labor issues was summed up in July, when Biden called the AFL-CIO his “domestic NATO.”

The corporate elite is closing ranks against the working class; the working class must unite to answer these attacks and to oppose wars being funded out of their pockets. The first condition for such a fight is that workers begin to break free from the sellout union officials and organize themselves to impose the will of the rank and file.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee was founded to build such an alternative leadership. It has links to other workers facing the same attacks all over the world, including at Boeing, UPS and in the post offices of four other countries.

In its founding statement last year, the Committee declared: “Postal workers need to be clear that this is a political fight against both corporate-controlled parties over the allocation of society’s resources. Any program of demands that begins with the premise that workers have to continue working until they literally drop dead on the job is a non-starter.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact