US Postal Service demands rural carriers send back “overpaid” wages right before Christmas season

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

Notices went out to 130,000 rural carriers this week that they may be invoiced for “overpayment,” supposedly due to mail volume data from the last 52 weeks having been incorrectly credited where territorial route adjustments were made.

In a video presentation, National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA) President Don Maston explained to workers that the new Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS) with the United States Postal Service (USPS), which the union agreed to behind workers’ backs without a vote, holds workers financially responsible for mis-adjusted mail volume data when routes were redistributed during the last evaluation in October.

According to one rural carrier who contacted the *World Socialist Web Site*, he and his co-workers will have to pay back $600-800 in the coming weeks, as he pointed out, “right at Christmas.”

The claim that rural carriers have been “overpaid” only serves as salt in their wounds. The massively unpopular RRECS is essentially a system for industrial-scale wage theft. Since it was introduced, two-thirds of letter carriers have seen their pay, which is based on piece-rate estimations of the workload of their routes, cut, in many cases by $10,000 or even $20,000 per year.

RRECS is part of the larger misnamed “Delivering for America” restructuring program, aimed at shedding tens of thousands of postal workers and thousands of local post offices as part of the ultimate privatization of USPS, currently an independent federal agency. Similar attacks are being carried out among city carriers, who are facing a new contract with only 1.3 percent annual wage increases. Office and distribution center workers are being subjected to many of the same conditions.

The American Postal Workers Union (APWU), representing clerks, maintenance, vehicle maintenance, and support employees has been working without a contract since September. APWU President Mark Dimondstein initiated the extension of the current contract including the “Penalty Overtime Exclusion” period that exempts the Postal Service from paying penalty overtime during the holiday peak season which started on November 2.

The rural carrier who spoke to the WSWS stated the routes at his post office have been overburdened since the onset of the Covid pandemic four years ago. Most of the routes were evaluated at 48 hours, but carriers were working sometimes 63 hours to complete their routes, resulting in their working 15 hours for free.

According to the most recent MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) governing RRECS, mail volume data from the last 52 weeks were incorrectly credited when territories were adjusted between routes. Donor routes, routes from which mail volume was moved, kept the incorrect mail volume data, thereby inflating the route’s evaluation and, likewise, the carrier’s pay.

Recipient Routes, routes that received additional volume, did not receive the mail volume data from the previous route, deflating its evaluation and causing the carrier to be underpaid.

The correction outlined in the MOU will be based on the fourth two-week “mini mail survey” that began August 23 and extends until September 6. At the time, rural carriers wrote in to the WSWS to report that mail volumes were artificially low which would ensure that their work would be undercounted and their wages suppressed for the coming six months.

Carriers’ pay was adjusted to reflect the lower volume. Speaking to the WSWS, the worker said the adjustment would amount to a $10,000 pay cut.

The new MOU will roll back carriers’ evaluations to the results of the August mini mail survey, regardless of the

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number of hours a carrier may have worked over the course of the year. Carriers who saw their pay increase as a result of the October evaluation will now have to pay back the amount they received over the August adjustment.

Additionally, route adjustments will be locked at the August counts for 52 weeks to ensure the mail volume data for next year remains low.

The worker says the NRLCA union has sided with management, with a regional representative telling him, “You were overpaid. What’s fair is fair.” When challenged about the hundreds of hours of his free labor the USPS enjoyed over the last year, the representative responded, “This isn’t that.”

Currently, rural carriers are working under an extension of the last contract which expired last May. If NRLCA President Don Maston can impose the Territorial Route Adjustments MOU, this underscores that fight to defend jobs and the post office as a public institution can only proceed through a rebellion against the sellout union officials.

The three major postal unions, representing hundreds of thousands of American workers, have ushered in decades of concessions betraying their membership by facilitating some of the most significant assaults on workers' jobs, safety, wages, and benefits in the history of the postal service. This necessitates the development of a network of rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the bureaucracy to workers themselves, based on a strategy to fight Delivering for America and the extreme anti-strike laws to which federal employees are subjected.

Last year, the US Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee was founded to organize a fight against DFA. But this is part of a worldwide struggle by postal workers, who are facing nearly identical attacks in every country.

In Canada, more than 50,000 postal workers have been on strike for a week against plans to restructure Canada Post through mass layoffs. Postal workers in Canada, Britain, Germany and Australia have all formed rank-and-file committees of their own, united in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

In the coming months, this fight will take on an overtly political form. Donald Trump’s second term as president of the United States poses an existential threat to the USPS, as it will surely accelerate privatization efforts which were initiated in his first term with Delivering for America.

The Postal Service is a prime target for Trump’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), headed by oligarch billionaires Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, which plans to cut $2 trillion from the federal budget through mass firings and “voluntary termination.”

This year, the Post Office reported a $9.5 billion net loss for fiscal 2024, an increase from a $6.5 billion loss in FY 2023. USPS officials said 80 percent of the agency’s losses came from fixed costs which include pension contributions and workers’ compensation claims.

USPS pension funding is an albatross that was placed around the neck of the agency when it was established as an independent entity under the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. This act mandated that USPS would operate as a self-sustaining business without taxpayer subsidies, requiring it to cover employee benefits, including pensions, from its revenue.

During the open session meeting of the Postal Service Board of Governors on Nov. 14, 2024, Postmaster DeJoy announced the retirements of Chairman Martinez and Governor Hajjar of the USPS Board of Governors. USPS governors are presidential appointments which need to be confirmed by the senate.

Currently, there are three vacant seats in the Board of Governors. Whether or not Biden fills those positions before he leaves office is unclear. Regardless, the Democrats are bending over backward to accommodate the incoming Trump administration, wishing him “success” even as he plans to rule “as a dictator from day one.”

Postal workers in the US must follow the example of their brothers and sisters in Canada and unite coast to coast, across rural and city carriers, and across vehicle operators, technicians, clerks, mail handlers and all crafts and build rank-and-file committees to fight for their interests.

If you agree with this, join us! Contact the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the contact form below or emailing USPSRankandFileCommittee@gmail.com today.

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