

Tentative agreement for USPS city letter carriers likely to be rejected

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Postal workers: take up the fight for rank-and-file control! Join the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form below.

The tentative agreement between the US Postal Service (USPS) and the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) appears to be headed for defeat. The rejection of the agreement would reflect not only the fighting mood among 205,000 active letter carriers, but also the provocative character of the tentative agreement itself.

A memo purporting to be from Deputy Postmaster General Doug A. Tulino that has been shared on Reddit indicates that NALC informed USPS that its members were likely to reject the tentative agreement. Such rejections have been rare at USPS in recent decades.

NALC President Brian Renfroe called the document “fake” in a press release. Regardless of the document’s authenticity, there is widespread opposition to the tentative agreement among letter carriers.

The agreement, which covers the period from 2023 through 2026, provoked outrage when it was announced in October, after almost two years of negotiations. It includes insulting annual raises of 1.3 percent, which constitute cuts to real pay when inflation is factored in. In addition, the agreement includes substandard cost-of-living adjustments and does nothing to block the major restructuring program called Delivering for America.

In addition, the union has also renewed the invasive surveillance system known as Technology Integrated Alternative Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process (TIAREAP). This system tracks letter carriers at every moment and penalizes them for “stationary events” that occur during their routes. Such events can include the delivery of mail to cluster boxes outside apartment buildings or necessary pauses for bathroom breaks.

TIAREAP data can influence management’s decisions about employment, wages and route bidding.

“This is nuts,” a postal worker commented to the *World Socialist Web Site*, referring to the tentative agreement. “This can’t pass.”

“We live in a country where 12.6 percent of our citizens get SNAP [food stamp] benefits, and many of them work for large corporations—including USPS,” wrote one worker on Reddit. “The federal government should not be subsidizing big business. Big business ought to be paying us fair wages.” Commenting on NALC’s alleged statement that workers likely would reject the tentative agreement, the worker wrote, “I am a touch surprised they didn’t rig the vote.”

Whatever its final form, the NALC contract will set the pattern for two other major postal contracts affecting hundreds of thousands of workers. Members of the National Rural Letter Carriers Association and members of the American Postal Workers Union are working under expired agreements. Each of the latter unions has failed to reach a new agreement with USPS, which will seek to use the NALC agreement as a template for these workers.

If the city letter carriers reject the tentative agreement, then negotiations between NALC and USPS will give way to binding arbitration. Far from being neutral parties, arbitrators enforce the needs of the government and the corporations. Binding arbitration would produce a tentative agreement with merely cosmetic changes, if any. NALC and USPS have already agreed on what workers must accept. The union hopes to use binding arbitration to force workers into a massively unpopular contract, while claiming that its hands are tied.

NALC members must reject the entire bargaining framework as illegitimate. It is designed to suppress

workers' democratic rights, prevent strikes and satisfy the financial needs of USPS at letter carriers' expense. History amply demonstrates that workers can only win their needs through struggle.

In 1970, President Richard Nixon proposed a 4.1 percent raise for NALC members, which is more than three times what they are being offered today. Nevertheless, letter carriers rejected it as unacceptable, because inflation had seriously eroded their wages, bringing some close to poverty. Letter carriers in New York began a wildcat strike, defying a ban on such actions by federal employees. More than 200,000 letter carriers and other postal workers across the country had joined the strike within two days. Falsely claiming that it had reached an agreement, NALC officials ended the strike, thus aiding the right-wing Nixon, who went on to reorganize the post office from a cabinet-level department to an independent agency known today as USPS. NALC is prepared to betray letter carriers in the same way today.

But more than a contract is at stake. The very future of mail delivery is threatened by the Delivering for America restructuring program. The plan, which has support from NALC and both capitalist parties, is being overseen by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a former executive of XPO Logistics. In introducing the program, DeJoy declared that it would eliminate 50,000 jobs, close thousands of post offices and slow mail delivery. Invasive surveillance of workers, longer mail routes and the expanded use of gig workers are other, equally retrogressive components of the program.

The goal of Delivering for America is to "Amazonify" and privatize USPS so that it can generate profits for its eventual shareholders. Facility closures and consolidations will reduce citizens' access to post offices, especially in rural areas. Easy access to fast and efficient mail delivery is not only everyone's right, but also a social need. Delivering for America tramples on this right in the interests of private profit.

Whatever the results of the vote on the tentative agreement, letter carriers will need to seize the initiative in their struggle. Having allowed negotiations to drag on for years, NALC is now working with USPS to impose a contract that would insult and injure its members. Letter carriers can have no faith in the union, which also is complicit in the implementation of Delivering for America.

Previous experience shows that arbitration will produce an agreement that favors the needs of management rather than those of the workers. Furthermore, it would be dangerous for workers to wait until the next union election in 2026 and attempt to oust Renfroe. Auto workers' experience with UAW President Shawn Fain and UPS workers' experience with Teamsters President Sean O'Brien are only the latest illustrations that union reformism is a dead end. Yesterday's so-called "reformers" pushed through massive job cuts at UPS and the auto industry, and now are lining up to work with Trump.

The urgent task is for letter carriers to establish their direct control over their struggle. Workers across the country must establish rank-and-file committees at their facilities. These committees must be independent of NALC and of both capitalist parties. By joining the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, letter carriers will be able to organize a real fight for livable wages and optimal working conditions. They must expand their fight by uniting with rural letter carriers, clerks, mail handlers and other postal workers.

A rebellion against the union apparatus is the first step in establishing the working class as an independent and powerful force. Letter carriers are part of a broader fight in defense of the rights of the working class, which are under unprecedented attack by President Donald Trump and his Democratic enablers. This fight can only be won if workers first establish their political and organizational independence.



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