

A letter from a northern California postal worker: “We need to flex our muscles as ‘essential workers’”

A northern California postal worker
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Build the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee to defend the post office! To join, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.

At the end of January, US Postal Service city letter carriers rejected by a more than two-to-one margin a contract proposal brought back their union, which included below-inflation raises, maintain the system of low-paid temporary labor and opened the door for massive job cuts under the misnamed “Delivering for America” program.

The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee has issued a statement to mobilize postal workers against the conspiracy by USPS officials and the National Association of Letter Carriers to impose another sellout deal under binding arbitration. The rank-and-file committee is fighting to unite USPS workers with federal workers whose jobs are being destroyed by Trump and Musk.

The following letter from a US Postal Service letter carrier in northern California was sent to the World Socialist Web Site.

As a displaced worker for almost eight months due to a private industry layoff, I searched for some sort of steady income. I was unable to land a similar position to my last job and my savings were circling the drain. One place that had plastered “NOW HIRING” signs on its walls was the US Postal Service, commonly known as USPS or the Post Office.

While I had no prior experience in that line of work, I applied. Government work should at least be steady, I thought to myself. After going through extensive background checks and a fingerprint check, I was given a conditional offer for a 90-day probation period. During this time, I was not to be entitled to any NALC

[National Association of Letter Carriers] union protections, although I could gather retirement contributions and some limited healthcare options.

I came to learn later on that the union leadership was offering to give us a paltry raise of 1.2%, less than the rate of inflation, essentially a decrease in wages. My current wage is \$22.13 an hour and would theoretically get to \$37 an hour after 16 years. Also, note that the \$22.13 starting hourly wage is nationwide. Even Amazon and fast food pays higher than that here. This is not a livable wage in the middle of Silicon Valley, maybe in Mississippi where the union leader lives. This is a betrayal of the 600,000 USPS workers who literally put their lives on the line every day to keep this country running.

We, as postal workers, need to flex our actual power as “essential workers.” Of course, deeply reactionary federal and state laws prohibit public workers from striking. What’s the point of having a union if the biggest weapon we have is taken out of our arsenal? I propose we do a wildcat strike and ground the nation’s mail to a halt. Perhaps then they’ll listen to our reasonable demands of a day’s fair wages for a day’s fair work. Our current presidential administration is performing executive actions despite what the Constitution and our laws outline. “Let the courts sort it out,” is their motto. Let our motto be: “We’ll back the working class no matter what.”

While I didn’t know quite what to expect, my experience hasn’t been the most optimal. My hours are limited and unpredictable. I only get a 24-hour notice before my report to duty, or sometimes even less during the morning of. My day off apart from the mandatory Sundays off fluctuates arbitrarily. Management is

capricious, condescending, verbally-abusive, and have unreasonable expectations.

The whole post office warehouse is in a sorry state of disrepair after decades of underfunding. I saw one posted sign papered over with the date of July 1966. Most active mail trucks date back to the late 1980s (LLV Long Life Vehicle indeed). Somehow USPS combines the worst of both worlds of the public and private sector: the bureaucracy paperwork, slow upgrades, and seniority system, while also being a for-profit enterprise with a bean-counter cost-cutting mentality including low pay, overworking/rushing employees, and ruthless monitoring and “efficiency” policing.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a Trump appointee from his first administration, has been part and parcel on dismantling the USPS and selling it for parts to their cronies. This Amazon-ification of our careers needs to cease. Furthermore, for all its faults, the United States Postal Service is a vital lifeline for everyone in this country that pre-dates 1776 and is explicitly written in our Constitution for our government to provide for.

A large percentage of USPS workers are actually from immigrant communities. Especially well-represented in San Jose, CA are Vietnamese and Punjabi Indians, yet the overall pool is quite diverse in terms of nationality. That is one benefit of a federal employer where discrimination is (or was) staunchly countered. As long as you were a U.S. Citizen or had the required work authorization, you were theoretically eligible. However, the Trump Administration’s going after “DEI” programs could serve as a blanket excuse to target employees based on their country of origin, disability, gender etc.

While undocumented workers are not included among U.S. postal workers, Trump’s attacks affect us all. There could be current employees of mixed immigration status that live together that may be separated. I find it interesting that corporations (and their money) can cross borders willy-nilly, while workers require special authorizations from the powers that be to move to where there is available work.

Although we come from many backgrounds, we are all united as members of the working class. We have more in common with our fellow workers from other countries than the 1% that control our home nations. The truth of the matter is that outsiders or some out-

group is targeted as a scapegoat for a society’s ills; it’s a tale as old as humanity, unfortunately.

When economies contract, as they are doing now, workers naturally become concerned about their livelihoods. The insidious part is that the 1% turns that fear not towards the 1% who created those very economic conditions, but to the hapless immigrant with little power! It’s a magician’s sleight of hand trick to divert workers’ attentions from the man behind the curtains pulling the levers to someone vulnerable they can pick on. It’s easier to punch down than to punch up where the real problem lies. We need to move past this outmoded thinking.



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