

# “The money is there to give the workers”: Brooklyn postal workers speak out after rejecting poverty contract

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17 February 2025

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Last month, United States Postal Service (USPS) letter carriers overwhelmingly rejected a provocative tentative agreement, which included mere 1.3 percent annual “raises” for workers. The contract would have facilitated massive cuts and consolidation under the “Delivering for America” program, including slashing tens of thousands of USPS jobs and closing over 1,000 post offices around the country.

Amid this show of anger by postal workers, reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to city carriers in Brooklyn, New York, on Friday about their thoughts on the contract and the way forward. They distributed copies of the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee statement, “After the NALC contract rejection: Organize the working class to save the US Postal Service!” was distributed.

Names have been changed to protect workers’ anonymity.

A veteran postal worker, Mark, condemned the NALC contract but said they have been facing low wage increases for the past 20 years.

We just get pennies in every contract. The COLA doesn’t match the rate of inflation. I’ve had to go on the overtime list to pay my bills and that disrupts your family life. I have to work so much overtime, it affects my quality of life with physical and mental stress. We work six days a week and 10 to 12 hours a day. The minimum overtime per day is 10 hours; the maximum is 12 hours a day. In my building, 15–20 percent of our workforce has to work this overtime.

We just deserve more because of the work we do in this weather, in the heat, with the overtime. In my first 10 years I was out working when my fingers were freezing.

We are in the courier market with UPS, FedEx, DHL and Amazon. They have a cap on pay of \$49 an hour at UPS. We have a cap on pay at \$37, \$38 or maybe \$40 an hour. That is the top for us. And we don’t reach that until we have worked here 15 years. We are supposed to be making the equivalent pay as the couriers in the private courier market without us doing overtime, but it’s not happening.

I don’t believe in the tier system. All workers should be equal. When I started in 1999, there were PTFs, part-time flex workers. For the first two years, I was a casual. I believe this equality has to take place around the world. It makes no sense that kids are literally starving to death around the world, and

there are these billionaires ruling here and doing what they are doing.

Audrey, a city carrier, said of the contract rejection:

As it should be! I think that the workers’ input is important for what they believe is fair, for what they should receive for the work they do. The contract that we currently have is just insufficient; 1.3 percent says that we’re only worth \$500 at the end on our base salary—not even in our actual checks, our base salary—which means it doesn’t really count. It’s almost like \$21 a week when you really do the math. It’s a shame.

It’s way below what the cost of living is! So that in turn makes it difficult for us as carriers to decide if this is going to continue to be our career because at 1.3 percent, we’re going to look around and say, “Hey, \$60,000 is out there, and it doesn’t have to be me delivering the mail to get it.”

My friend works for UPS, and when he read the contract negotiation, he too was outraged about the percentage that was given to us as workers.

On the Trump administration’s slashing of federal jobs, Audrey said:

It’s terrifying. They’re slashing something that’s essential. Especially us, as letter carriers, as postal workers, we’re essential. To try and come in and just cut all the federal workers, it’s ridiculous. They’re ultimately just going and destroying foundational building blocks of our country. If you take away federal jobs, what else are you going to do? You’re going to leave us stranded. We’ll have nothing.

It’s a crying shame because the post office is a number one essential position that is necessary for the country. Not just for me because I work here, but it’s essential. People receive their medication through the post office. It’s an essential job, and for them to cut jobs, it’s just wrong.

Audrey strongly supported the idea of unifying workers across the

entire logistics industry: “Everyone! It’s not just carriers, it’s not just mail handlers, it’s not just clerks, it’s all of us.”

Another worker said:

I don’t trust [Postmaster General] Louis DeJoy, who Trump put in in ’16. Trump lost in 2020, but DeJoy stayed. ... Now Trump is back, and he’s going after everything—DEI [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion], AID [Agency for International Development]!

With Trump back and DeJoy being his tool, there may not be a public post office left by the time they come back with a new contract.

Another veteran city carrier, Manuel, commented on the overwhelming contract rejection. “That will tell you everything. How the hell did the union say 1.3 percent for three years? You know the cost of life?! There’s no way. It has to be at least 10 percent for the next three years.”

He supported the idea of collective strike action—“It would be a great strike, just to show the force that we have”—but said he was concerned over the threat of the Trump administration potentially firing everybody.

Asked what he thought about the current administration’s actions targeting federal workers and immigrants, he responded:

You said the key word—millionaires and billionaires. They will never, ever, ever, not before, not today, not tomorrow, not the future, they are not going to fight for the regular jobs. They’re going to fight for their own interests. “We have to cut this, so we get more money...” is their attitude.

The money is there to give to the workers. If you give billions of dollars for wars 10,000 miles from here, wars that don’t affect this country at all—everybody knows that—and there’s billions left, and you cannot give something to the US workers? ... How much more money do you want? You have a billion dollars! Where are you going to spend it? That’s crazy!

On the drive to label immigrants as criminals, Manuel replied, “That’s completely BS, especially in big cities like New York. Who do you think moves the city? Restaurants, trucks, docks, car washes, etc.”

Manuel was also very supportive of workers uniting internationally. “That would be great!”

Michael, a young city carrier, said he thought the NALC tentative agreement “sucks.” “Postal workers deserve a lot more. We’re out here right now in the freezing cold and doing our job still. We’re worth a lot more than 1.3 percent.

“I know that the union probably doesn’t want to strike right now. I think that probably should happen. If the union said to go out on strike, we’d go on strike.”

He said his most important demand was, “Equity, monetarily. There’s a big difference between top paid people and people at the bottom. So the lines need to be drawn in and closed a lot because we’re all doing the same job here. Some people get paid a lot more than others.”

Michael was also strongly opposed to the attacks on federal jobs by Trump and Musk. “It would take a few lifetimes to get as much money as Elon Musk, so I don’t think that’s right.”

Lola, a letter carrier for six years, added:

A lot of people here say Trump and Musk cannot touch us. We are independent and don’t receive government money, but I have heard rumors about privatization.

The shop steward says we can’t strike anymore. But if we strike, that is the only way we can get what we want, like higher pay. Here in the city the costs are extra high. The main president of the union, Renfroe, should be gotten rid of. We should strike.

Thomas, a city carrier with over 30 years of experience, said:

Things just keep going downhill. We have lived and worked through seven lockdowns, from Ebola to anthrax to Hurricane Sandy and COVID-19. If we survived it, we never got compensated for it. I don’t know what happened with the contract. But I agree with you, we need a new leadership of rank-and-file workers.

A young city carrier assistant (CCA) commented:

I was not able to vote because I was hired in November. I am a CCA, and the wage doesn’t match the work we do. I work a full 40-hour week and a lot of overtime. I get paid just \$19.33 an hour. Although I couldn’t vote in the election, I think CCAs should get paid the same as other workers doing the same work.

Another CCA, who was hired around the same time, said:

I definitely think that CCAs should be getting paid the same as career workers. We do as much work, and as you can see, I just finished my shift, but they are already calling me back to do another.



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