

# City carriers' contract heads to binding arbitration, as Trump and Musk take aim at the US Postal Service

Tom Hall  
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*The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online meeting this Sunday at 3 p.m. Eastern/12 noon Pacific, "Mobilize the working class to save the US Postal Service and other federal programs!" Register for the meeting here.*

The contract for over 200,000 city letter carriers at the US Postal Service is headed for binding arbitration, the National Association of Letter Carriers confirmed on Wednesday. This follows an historic rejection by NALC members of a provocative sellout contract by a more than two-to-one margin.

The move sets up the next stage in the struggle by workers against the years-long corporate assault on USPS, which is being accelerated by Trump. On Thursday, the *Washington Post* reported that Trump intends to take direct personal control of USPS, which has operated as an independent federal agency since 1971, and fire its entire Board of Governors. The board is responsible for overseeing its operations and selecting the Postmaster General.

Currently, the Postmaster General is Louis DeJoy, a Trump ally appointed by the Board during his first term in office. On Monday, however, DeJoy announced he intends to step down. While not explaining the rationale behind this decision, it is obviously related to Trump's plans for the post office.

Taking control of USPS would be the first step in Trump's plan to dismantle USPS entirely and privatize it, which his backers indicated was a goal even before he took office. It would also be a massive escalation of Trump's sweeping and illegal purge of the federal government, which has already forced out tens of thousands of federal employees and rendered entire agencies inoperative. The USPS is the largest single civilian agency in the federal government, with more than 600,000 workers.

It also would represent the culmination of a decades-long campaign to privatize USPS stretching back to the Nixon administration. The post offices of other countries, including Royal Mail in Britain and Deutsche Post in Germany, are already privatized and subject to the whims of the market.

Much of the coverage of DeJoy's resignation has focused on his attempts to massively cut costs through the misnamed "Delivering for America" program, which has been disastrous in terms of the functioning of USPS but has not progressed quickly enough in the eyes of the oligarchy. In a combative recent Senate hearing, DeJoy and various senators exchanged blame for the sluggishness of "cost-savings," with DeJoy accusing Congress of imposing

restrictions on the ratio of full-time "career" employees to part-timers.

Trump's personal control of USPS, combined with another spate of executive orders, provides an obviously—and flagrantly illegal—solution to this "problem," paving the way for tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of job losses.

The aim of the attack on federal workers, spearheaded by fascist billionaire Elon Musk and his so-called Department of Government Efficiency, is to both slash spending in order to finance Wall Street profits and the military and police, and to establish direct and personal control by Trump over all aspects of government. DOGE is also attempting to seize control of databases containing sensitive personal information of hundreds of millions of Americans, which can be used to go after opponents of the White House.

Taking personal control of USPS will give Trump direct access to sensitive communications which travel via the post office, including tax forms as well as mail-in ballots. The supposed delay in processing of such ballots formed a key part of Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was "stolen."

Privatizing USPS will also be a boondoggle for its private competitors like Amazon, whose founder Jeff Bezos is a major supporter of Trump. It may also well prove to be a boon to DeJoy personally: in a flagrant conflict of interest, DeJoy has owned a private business which contracted with the USPS throughout his tenure.

The situation requires organized opposition from the working class in order to stop it. In a statement released Monday, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees urged the unity of "federal workers, postal workers and private-sector workers, to organize mass demonstrations and other forms of collective action to defend jobs and social programs."

The statement concluded:

The development of committees to oppose the assault on federal workers must be connected to the defense of democratic rights against dictatorship, including through neighborhood and workplace committees to defend immigrants. The wealth of the oligarchy, which stands behind Trump's threats to democratic rights, must be

expropriated and America's war machine dismantled to vastly improve public health, education, infrastructure and key social programs on which tens of millions rely.

## Binding arbitration

While Trump deliberately breaks every law which he can, in his bid to establish a dictatorship, the union bureaucracy is demanding that workers cravenly obey undemocratic labor laws, including bans on strikes by federal government employees. In the case of NALC, under the guise of "neutral arbitration," supplemented by anti-democratic anti-strike statutes, the post office and the union bureaucracy will impose the same contract workers rejected with only minor alterations, or possibly much worse given that Trump is now taking aim at USPS.

This contract will then serve as the basis for similar concessions to be imposed upon workers in the other postal unions, including the American Postal Workers Union, which covers clerks, maintenance and motor vehicle workers, and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association.

It also recalls the Presidential Emergency Board convened under Biden in 2022 to propose a national railroad contract. Railroaders rebelled against the contract and the union bureaucracy which promoted it, sparking a move towards a national strike which was averted only through anti-strike legislation in Congress. In the end, President Biden unilaterally imposed the same contract railroaders had overwhelmingly rejected.

The chair of the three-person arbitration board, which will also consist of representatives from USPS and NALC, will be Dennis Nolan.

As the WSWS wrote last year when union and postal officials selected Nolan as arbitrator in potential future proceedings:

The selection of Nolan is a clear signal that the government intends to impose a brutal contract on postal workers. In October 2002, President George W. Bush appointed Nolan to the Presidential Board of Inquiry on the Work Stoppage in the San Francisco West Coast Ports ... The report was a critical link in the chain to more direct government intervention. Only three hours after the report was presented, a federal judge granted a request for an anti-strike injunction from the Bush administration, under the terms of the anti-worker Taft-Hartley Act.

For years, the USPS has been systematically dismantled through DeJoy's 10-year plan, which aims to slash routes, close 1,000 local post offices and consolidate operations into a handful of automated facilities. The purpose is to prepare for the USPS' ultimate privatization by reorganizing USPS from a public service into a profit-making entity.

A key part of the program is chasing out career postal employees through systematic wage theft—rural carriers have seen their annual salaries drop by \$10,000 and even \$20,000 due to the new RRECS compensation system—and invasive monitoring, such as the TIAREAP program for city carriers. Both of these programs were signed off on by the union bureaucracy outside of the contracts, in

separate Memoranda of Understanding.

The result has been a disaster for the general public, with mail being delayed for weeks at a time in many cases, including time-sensitive material such as cancer screening results.

NALC President Brian Renfroe has made an empty pledge to "fight like hell in interest arbitration." But a leaked management letter, whose authenticity has been denied by NALC, suggests that the union bureaucracy already quietly said it will not challenge measures to "right size the organization" (layoffs) and "alter work rules."

At any rate, NALC has publicly supported Delivering for America, even lying to its own members that the plan does not involve job cuts. NALC officials issued a statement praising DeJoy's record after he announced he would step down, citing his alleged "commitment to ensuring the Postal Service remains a vital institution capable of serving the American public for generations to come."

They specifically endorse Delivering for America in the statement, claiming that "with its focus on infrastructure investment and long-term financial stability, [it] reflected a genuine desire to strengthen the Postal Service's core mission: providing universal service to every American household, regardless of geography." As a matter of fact, the closures disproportionately affect rural post offices, more than 60 percent of which are "unprofitable," therefore violating the USPS' universal service mandate.

It is urgent that postal workers take matters into their own hands. A recent statement by the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee declared:

**We must act now to fight back.** The first step is for us to adopt the principle that this entire process has no legitimacy. We must organize independently of the NALC bureaucracy, and appeal for as wide support as possible in the working class. We must build up a network of rank-and-file committees at post offices around the country. These organs, open to all USPS workers but strictly excluding management or union officials, will give us the power to enforce our democratic decisions, countermand violations of our rights and transfer power to the rank-and-file.

The USPSWRFC is holding a meeting this Sunday to discuss the way forward.



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