

USPS rural carriers contract sets stage for privatization

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On Friday, the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) announced a tentative agreement (TA) for a new three-year contract covering approximately 130,000 rural postal workers.

A brief "highlights" package was posted to the NRLCA's website. As expected, the deal is a virtual copy of the concessions-filled agreement imposed earlier this year on city letter carriers by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC). That deal was enforced by arbitration after city carriers rejected a similar deal by 70 percent in an earlier ratification vote.

"It's basically a carbon copy of the City carrier contract," one letter carrier remarked to the WSWs. "No matter how bad inflation is or was they hold the standard of 1.3 percent raise. Over the last couple of years inflation has gone up at least 30 percent on most items, housing costs have doubled, they are actual reports of homeless carriers and somehow a 1.3% raise is fair.

"Even voting 'No' by members on this contract will send it over to arbitration where the arbiter will change some minor detail of the contract and it will be done because they are paid off in this corrupt system to shackle the working class. Meanwhile federal employee benefits are being stripped away and insurance premiums are swelling while actual coverages for care is shrinking."

The new TA offers meager wage increases of just 1.3 percent, 1.4 percent, and 1.5 percent over the next three years—not even keeping up with inflation, let alone making up for years of real wage losses. It is a contract designed to pave the way for deeper cuts as part of the privatization plan being prepared by the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

The deal must be rejected. But defeating the contract requires more than a "No" vote. Postal workers must take matters into their own hands—organizing independently of both the government and the corrupt union bureaucracy, through the expansion of the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

RRECS wage theft

The contract does nothing to address systematic wage theft through the Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS), a piecework-style system that determines pay not by the actual hours worked but through an opaque algorithm that evaluates how long a route should take to deliver. RRECS was imposed behind carriers' backs through a side agreement between the NRLCA bureaucracy and USPS in 2022.

RRECS has already been used to slash thousands of dollars from rural carriers' annual wages. Some workers have reported pay cuts of over \$10,000 and, in extreme cases, even \$20,000. More than two-thirds of all rural carriers have been affected. Despite widespread outrage, the system remains in place. It is referred to in the new contract, which speaks of an upcoming "next RRECS evaluation period." In other words, further cuts are likely on the way.

Privatization on the way

While the TA is a direct attack on rural carriers, its implications go far beyond wages. It paves the way for the destruction of the USPS itself as a public service by privatizing its operations. Trump officials, including Elon Musk, the fascist billionaire in charge of DOGE, have indicated that the USPS is on their list of agencies to be destroyed.

The destruction of entire departments and hundreds of thousands of federal layoffs under DOGE is a key part of Trump's plans to establish a dictatorship, operating on behalf of and staffed directly by the Wall Street oligarchy.

In order to privatize USPS, it must be made attractive to investors. Wells Fargo recently published a "road map" to privatization which emphasized the need for the agency to cut costs and hike postage rates. According to that report, three-quarters of all routes are unprofitable, particularly in rural areas.

In practice, the USPS has already become a de facto delivery contractor for Amazon Prime in rural areas. Massive volumes of Amazon packages take priority over other types of mail, resulting in workers being forced into extreme overtime with essential personal mail arriving late or not at all. This illegal favoritism is an open secret—and one the union refuses to seriously challenge.

A historic wrecking operation

The USPS was not founded to function as a business. It was created by the Continental Congress during the American Revolution as a national public service. The principle of universal service—providing the same quality mail delivery to a remote farmhouse as to a downtown office—has long been central to its mission.

That principle is now on the chopping block. The new contract will only accelerate the transformation of the USPS into a profit-seeking enterprise, with rural delivery, universal service and jobs sacrificed on the altar of “efficiency.”

The destruction of the USPS has been decades in the making. It began with its demotion from a Cabinet-level department to a supposedly “independent” agency in 1970 under President Richard Nixon, following a massive nationwide wildcat strike, after which it stopped receiving any taxpayer funding and was forced to rely entirely on revenue. This framework set the stage for continuous cuts in the name of profitability.

In recent years, the Delivering for America (DFA) plan, a cost-cutting program adopted by management and supported by the unions, has further hollowed out the institution. DFA has led to mass delays in essential deliveries, undermining public confidence in the US Postal Service. These failures will be used by the Trump administration as “proof” that USPS must be privatized—when in fact it is the outcome of a deliberate sabotage campaign.

Former Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, appointed under Trump, was the original architect of DFA. Though recently forced to resign—reportedly because he was seen as insufficiently loyal—his removal has not altered this trajectory.

Union bureaucrats cover for Trump

The union bureaucracy has enabled these pro-corporate attacks every step of the way. Both the NALC and NRLCA openly support the Delivering for America plan. While they were compelled to issue statements opposing Musk after his highly publicized comments in favor of privatization, they have taken no action even to raise the alarm among their own members, much less mobilize them in action.

In March, the NALC, NRLCA and the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) held rallies nationwide, which encompassed a small fraction of their members. In the case of the NALC, these rallies were being held even as it was finalizing the sellout contract in binding arbitration, which was announced the week after.

As the Trump administration openly violates the Constitution, defies courts, and carries out mass deportations and surveillance programs, the union officials attempt to limit workers to writing to their congresspeople and other toothless measures. They insist postal workers abide by undemocratic laws banning them from striking even though Trump violates the law at will.

Indeed, given the fact that Trump recently ripped up labor

contracts for much of the federal workforce, there is no guarantee that this new contract, even if ratified, will not be ripped up overnight.

Build the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee

The only path forward is for workers to organize independently of the union bureaucracy. Rural and city carriers, mail handlers, clerks—across crafts and locations—must unite in the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RFC) to oppose the contract, defend jobs and protect the public service mission of the USPS as part of a wider movement of the working class against dictatorship and oligarchy.

Workers can only mobilize their power through a fight against both Trump and his enablers in the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy. This also means rejecting “America First” nationalism in favor of international working class solidarity—linking up with postal workers in Canada, Britain, Germany and beyond, who are all facing the same attacks on jobs and public services.

As the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee declared in its latest statement, “For a rank-and-file movement to save the Post Office and oppose dictatorship!”:

Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. The only way to save the post office—and American democracy—is through the mass mobilization of the working class. The working class is the most powerful force on earth. If only we know how to use that power, we can defeat the attacks by Trump and his handful of oligarchs and right wingers.



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