

US postal unions seek to divert opposition to privatization to dead-end appeals to Congress

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28 May 2025

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Union heads from the four major postal unions participated in a Capitol Hill roundtable on May 14 organized by US Representative Stephen Lynch (Democrat-Massachusetts) and Representative Steny Hoyer (Democrat-Maryland). The roundtable was a stunt designed to cover up the responsibility of the union bureaucrats and the Democratic Party for preparing the way for the privatization of the United States Postal Service (USPS), a top priority of the Trump administration.

Representing the four postal unions at the roundtable were Brian Renfroe, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC); Don Maston, president of the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA); Paul Hogrogian, president of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU); and Judy Beard, legislative and political director of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and bureaucrats from six other major trade unions participated in the roundtable as well.

The event was held following the announcement of Trump's pick for new Postmaster General (PMG), David Steiner, a current member of the board of Fedex, signalling that plans to farm out the post office to private corporations is well advanced. In opposition to this, the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a statement calling for "emergency action, up to and including a national strike," to be organized "from below" in opposition to the sellout bureaucrats.

The perspective at the town hall was directed against a real struggle. Participants mouthed opposition to reconciliation provisions advanced by the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability (HCOA) on April 30, which would raise federal workers' healthcare premiums while reducing pension benefits. They also

stumped for House Resolution 70, a nonbinding statement against privatization that obligates nobody to do anything. Even this will almost certainly not pass the Republican-controlled House, as the members of the roundtable well know.

The HCOA has approved a hike in Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) employee contributions to 4.4 percent, eliminating the FERS special annuity supplement for retirees and reducing retiree annuity payments. These were incorporated into the One Big Beautiful Bill Act that passed on May 22. Republicans shoehorned these benefits cuts into the bill through the parliamentary maneuver of budget reconciliation, an anti-democratic tactic used by both parties to force through unpopular policies.

During the proceedings, the labor bureaucrats took turns verbally denouncing Republican lawmakers while posting news bulletins to their members about their so-called "fight" on Capitol Hill, i.e., empty statements from NALC, NRLCA, APWU and NPMHU. They have also called members to "take action" by calling their congressional representatives (NALC, APWU, AFL-CIO), even as the Democrats roll over in response to Trump.

A major goal of the hearing was to exculpate the Democrats from responsibility by shifting blame exclusively on Republicans. In reality, both big business parties have laid the groundwork for the privatization of the post office, starting in earnest with the 1970 Postal Reorganization Act, which demoted it from a cabinet-level department into an independent, self-funded agency. This law was passed in Congress and signed by President Nixon following the Great Postal Strike the same year.

For years, the union bureaucrats have lied to workers that privatization is not on the way. Worse, NALC and the NRLCA have explicitly supported the "Delivering for America" restructuring program launched during the Biden administration by the last PMG, Trump supporter Louis DeJoy. The program which aimed to prepare for the

sell-off of USPS by slashing costs, cutting routes and closing and consolidating post offices and distribution centers.

In fact, in 2022 the bureaucrats of all the postal unions backed the Postal Service Reform Act (PSRA), which gutted the postal healthcare program and surrendered over \$5 billion in assets to the federal government. In exchange, the retirement pre-funding mandate, initiated under the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act—which required USPS to “pre-fund” up to 75 years’ worth of retirement premiums for each worker, causing USPS’ financials to go in the red overnight—was ended and the \$56 billion accrued through this mandate over 16 years returned to the postal service. The threat of reducing postal delivery from six days a week to five days was also withdrawn.

In other words, postal workers were extorted to forfeit \$5 billion in real assets and lose their healthcare program in exchange for the status quo and accounting tricks, setting up the current healthcare debacle. The union bureaucrats still maintain this was a “victory.”

In 2023-24, three of the four unions’ contracts expired, but none of the union apparatuses raised in their bargaining demands the key issues confronting workers: privatization, job security, wages and benefits, job safety and heat exhaustion, the use of surveillance technologies to police the workforce, or rampant abuses by postal management.

Now that this has become impossible to conceal, the bureaucracy is actively sabotaging a struggle by helping to impose new substandard contracts.

After city carriers overwhelmingly rejected a new NALC contract with provocative 1.3 percent pay increases, the NALC and Renfroe went to binding interest arbitration to impose almost the same contract without even a vote. Meanwhile, even as Trump violates the law and the Constitution in his plan to establish a dictatorship, the postal unions loyally abide by undemocratic laws banning postal workers from striking.

The NALC contract also served as the basis for the NRLCA contract, where voting is currently underway.

The Democratic Party, with the support of the bureaucracy, has not hesitated to use state repression to block strikes. In 2022, after railroaders decisively rejected a contract brokered by the White House, Biden went to Congress to pass a bipartisan strike ban and impose the deal. A critical role in covering for the Democrats’ “left flank” was played by pseudo-left figures like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who were critical

in the maneuvering to secure the bill’s quick passage. The rail unions also played a key role by blocking a strike until after the midterm election, giving Congress the space it needed to take up the legislation.

The union bureaucracy is increasingly hated by workers. But anger alone is not enough. Only through an organized rebellion against the bureaucracy, through the organization of rank-and-file committees, can the ground be prepared for a showdown to save USPS and jobs in general. Such a fight must inevitably be directed towards mobilizing the working class as a whole against the slide towards fascism and the domination of society by a tiny clique of capitalist oligarchs.

The sabotage this week of a national strike of 55,000 Canada Post workers by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) shows the basic dynamic is the same in every country. As the Canadian Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee explained, “The CUPW leadership has consistently deceived the rank and file by denying the political character of the struggle they face and the necessity of broadening it to other sections of the working class.”

In its statement last month, the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee proposed the following demands for postal workers to rally around:

No to privatization! Save USPS as a public service!

•End USPS’ collaboration in attacks on immigrants and opponents of Trump!

Demand inflation-busting pay increases!

End the RRECS and TIAREAP programs!

•Reverse all job and pay cuts and facility closures since the start of Delivering for America!

•End two-tier pay scales! All workers should be on the Table 1 pay schedule!

•Instead of privatizing USPS, convert Fedex, UPS, Amazon and other logistics corporations into public entities under workers’ control to use this infrastructure for the common good, not profits.

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