

USPS rural carrier contract ratified with just 11 percent turnout, as union clears path for privatization

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The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online public meeting this Sunday, June 29, at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time, “For a rank-and-file investigation into the extreme heat deaths of two USPS workers!” Register here to attend.

Only 9,730 rural carriers—less than 7.5 percent of the 130,000 of them employed by the United States Postal Service—voted to approve the 2024–2027 contract, according to the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association (NRLCA), which proclaimed “victory” on June 15. Overall turnout was just 11 percent. With one-third of those casting ballots voting against and nearly 90 percent abstaining, the result amounts to an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the contract, the NRLCA and the broader postal union apparatus.

Voting is ongoing this month for postal clerks in the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) on a contract patterned after both the NRLCA and National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) deals. The APWU “contract” does not even exist as such, given that the language has not been finalized. The NALC’s contract was imposed in binding arbitration with tiny changes after city letter carriers rejected the deal by 70 percent.

The rural carriers are among the most heavily exploited workers at USPS. They work on a form of piece-rate where they are paid according to the “value” of their routes as arbitrarily assigned by management. A new program, the Rural Route Evaluation Compensation System (RRECS), led to two-thirds of rural carriers losing income, many over \$10,000 and as high as \$20,000 a year.

Service in the country’s rural areas is particularly targeted by a major restructuring program, Delivering for America, given the higher percentage of post offices in these areas, which management complains are “unprofitable.” But the post office’s mandate since its founding during the American Revolution was to provide mail as a public service, not to make money.

This has been eroded over many decades, since then President Richard Nixon demoted it from a cabinet-level department to an independent agency with no taxpayer funding. Now, the series of bipartisan attacks on the post office are reaching their culmination.

The bureaucracy is lining up behind the Trump administration’s ongoing preparations to privatize the Postal Service. Trump has installed David Steiner, a former FedEx board member, to take over as Postmaster General in July. Steiner and other corporate-aligned officials are developing plans behind closed doors to

dismantle and sell off the public postal infrastructure.

The NRLCA, led by President Don Maston, has inserted no language into the contract to defend against privatization. It has made no effort to mobilize opposition—or even to alert the membership about what is taking place. Based on the content of the agreement and the political direction of the Postal Service, this may be the last contract rural carriers sign as federal postal employees.

This underscores the need for postal workers to take matters into their own hands, building the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee as an alternative leadership to the sellout union officials. Only through independent organizations can workers coordinate actions to save the post office, as part of a broader movement underway against the Trump administration and the social inequality both parties defend.

Privatization plans

One possible route for privatization was laid out in a report by Wells Fargo Bank. Its proposal calls for steep postal rate hikes and the elimination of three-quarters of all routes nationwide—a measure that would wipe out every rural delivery route in the country. Other indicators of privatization plans continue to surface.

At a March 25 press event at the National Press Club in Washington D.C., NALC President Brian Renfroe, speaking alongside the heads of the other postal unions including Maston, stated: “The private companies that are more than likely behind this have no interest in delivering 376 million pieces of mail to 169 million addresses. Without the work we do, 51 million rural households and businesses would have no guaranteed postal delivery service.”

But this did not prevent Renfroe and the NALC bureaucracy from openly supporting Delivering for America, which is a prelude to privatization designed to slash costs, break up local facilities and make the workforce more “flexible.”

In Britain, the destructive consequences of postal privatization are already playing out. Royal Mail, first privatized in 2013, is now being taken over by private equity billionaire Daniel

Kretinsky with the full cooperation of the Labour government and the Communication Workers Union. Kretinsky has seized control of a major portion of the postal workers' pension fund and is attempting to eliminate the legal obligation for universal service.

Thousands of jobs are on the line in Britain. With the Communication Workers Union on the side of management, the fight against the buyout is being led by the UK Royal Mail Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

Amazon, valued at over \$2.25 trillion, is emerging as a likely beneficiary—if not the direct purchaser—of the US Postal Service. As *Truthout* recently reported, Amazon is quietly positioning itself to absorb large sections of the USPS. The company is constructing a \$4 billion rural “spoke and wheel” delivery system, with plans to employ 100,000 nonunion workers by 2026. This network will enable Amazon to bypass USPS entirely in vast areas of the country, accelerating the defunding and dismantling of public mail delivery.

Meanwhile, Amazon has begun reducing the volume of packages it sends through USPS and UPS, weaponizing its massive logistics footprint to place both under financial stress. If this continues, rural postal workers will be left with a “choice” between losing their jobs or working under the brutal conditions of Amazon warehouses and delivery routes.

A June 20 article in *Government Executive*, titled “DOGE holds meetings with White House, new postal leadership and Treasury,” also details closed-door discussions “with far-reaching impact for the future of the Postal Service.” Steiner will almost certainly accelerate former Postmaster General Louis DeJoy’s “Delivering for America” (DFA) plan.

Sham vote at NRLCA

The rural carriers' vote was not seriously conducted and cannot be considered legitimate. Informational meetings held across the country for the contract were perfunctory, with only one meeting per each state. This means that many workers would have had to travel hundreds of miles to attend meetings in larger states like Texas and California. In Oregon, only a handful of workers attended the meeting in Portland. In other states, meetings consisted of nothing more than a video.

A rural carrier in Wyoming, Sharon (a pseudonym used to protect against retaliation) told the WSW: “The union is ‘in bed’ with the postal service. It would have been pushed through just like the city contract and RRECS. It is set up similar to the ‘dispute process after counts.’ It is essentially a gaslighting technique to make carriers feel like they have a say, but there are no clear instructions on anything. And in the end they kick it back with vague reasons and no chance to solve. It is a way to delay, stonewall and deflect while they take more and more away from rural carriers.

“We have stood up and said this is wrong. We have grieved. We have disputed. We have tried to work things the best we could, only to have our union reps side with management, be told lies,

etc. In the end, they did what they wanted!

“Why is it ok to owe us that many COLAs [cost of living adjustments]? What is the excuse? They did the same thing to the RCAs (rural carrier assistants) with their leave a couple of years ago and ripped them off. No one batted an eye. What was once a prestigious job is now a baseline position.”

In the case of RRECS, this was the result of a side deal between USPS and the NRLCA. The union initially filed a Step 4 grievance once it became clear that most workers were losing pay. But it soon signed a dispute resolution agreement that shifted the burden of proof onto individual carriers, with extremely limited timeframes and little to no access to the required USPS data. The Step 4 grievance was later abandoned entirely.

Maston’s response to the RRECS disaster was to vent his spleen at workers, “Rural carriers are finally getting paid what they deserve for their evaluations.” In another revealing statement, Maston said, “We have had it too good for too long.”

The NRLCA is thoroughly discredited. In 2023, more than 10,000 rural carriers submitted cards to decertify the union. But replacing the NRLCA with another union like the Teamsters, which also collaborates with management and even Trump, is no solution. The only way forward is to build a rebellion against the union bureaucracy itself.

The way forward is through a fight to abolish the pro-corporate bureaucrats and return power to the postal workers themselves, as part of a strategy of mobilizing the whole working class behind USPS workers, including postal workers in Canada, Britain and other countries where mail service is under attack.

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