

NALC union prepares to deny letter carriers right to contract vote as historic USPS cuts loom

Erik Schreiber, Tom Hall
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The National Association of Letter Carriers is preparing to deny city letter carriers even the right to vote on their next contract if closed-door mediation with the US Postal Service proceeds directly to binding arbitration.

NALC and USPS remain in mediation after failing to reach a tentative agreement before the May 22 expiration of the 2023–2026 National Agreement. If no tentative agreement is reached, according to NALC, “unresolved issues would be addressed through an interest arbitration process,” producing “a final and binding decision on the contents of a new National Agreement.” In other words, workers would not have the right to vote on the contract. Its terms would be dictated by an arbitrator.

This is a deliberate attempt to bind workers’ hands under conditions in which USPS management, the Board of Governors, Congress and the Trump administration are preparing the most far-reaching attack on the Postal Service in its modern history. Under cover of a cash-flow crisis, they are floating sweeping changes that would undermine universal service, threaten jobs and living standards, and more directly integrate USPS infrastructure into the operations of private logistics giants.

The last contract exposed the sham character of this entire process. In January 2025, letter carriers rejected NALC’s tentative agreement by roughly 70 percent, with 63,680 voting no and only 26,304 voting yes. But the vote was overridden. The contract workers had rejected was imposed, in all essentials, by binding arbitration in March 2025.

Now NALC is preparing a process in which workers may not even get the chance to vote before arbitration imposes the next agreement. Management and the union bureaucracy do not want the contract to become a referendum among letter carriers on the destruction of universal service, the spread of speedup and surveillance,

and the assault on wages, jobs and safety. They want the terms dictated behind closed doors before opposition can be organized.

Workers cannot accept this. The contract struggle must become the starting point for a broader mobilization in defense of wages, working conditions and the Postal Service itself. But this requires a rebellion against the NALC apparatus and the entire state-controlled framework of mediation, arbitration and the strike ban.

This is the perspective fought for by the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The committee has insisted that postal workers cannot defend their jobs, wages and lives through union apparatuses that have collaborated with USPS’s restructuring. Workers must build rank-and-file committees in every station and facility, take the struggle into their own hands and link up with postal and logistics workers across the country.

Postmaster General David Steiner laid out the framework at the May 8 Board of Governors meeting. He declared that the present postal business model is “unsustainable” because revenues and savings cannot cover the costs of the universal service obligation, or USO—the mandate that USPS provide regular, affordable service to every community, regardless of profitability.

Steiner presented Congress with two choices: reimburse USPS for universal service—which he knows will not happen—or strip away the mandates that require six-day delivery, existing service standards and the maintenance of small and rural post offices. The first option is political cover for the second. The real policy is to gut universal service in practice and allow USPS to operate ever more openly according to private profit criteria.

USPS has already moved to open its last-mile delivery network to Amazon, DHL, UPS and other corporations, transforming public infrastructure into an Amazon-style

logistics platform. This has been prepared through the Delivering for America restructuring program, begun under former Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, which has consolidated facilities, lengthened routes, slowed mail, imposed more onerous schedules and subjected workers to speedup and surveillance.

NALC has not opposed this restructuring. It openly supports Delivering for America, with President Brian Renfro flatly denying to a WSWS reporter last year that it meant the elimination of jobs. NALC also collaborated with USPS in the Technology Integrated Alternate Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process, or TIAREAP, a GPS-based monitoring system used to discipline carriers for so-called “stationary events” and other deviations from management’s automated route expectations.

TIAREAP was directly implicated in the death of Dallas letter carrier Eugene Gates Jr., who had been disciplined over a “stationary event” before later collapsing and dying on his route during extreme heat. In 2025, Dan Workman and Jacob Taylor also collapsed and died on their routes amid high temperatures.

All postal workers are being subjected to unsafe conditions. At the Palmetto Regional Processing and Distribution Center in Georgia, Demarcus Little, Russell Scruggs Jr., Eric Smith and Sharon Barnes have all died over the past two years. The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee’s investigation found that Palmetto lacked written safety protocols, on-site medical personnel, defibrillators and reliable cell service, causing delays and confusion in getting emergency care to stricken workers.

Letter carriers urgently need major wage increases, the abolition of the two-tier wage system, a shorter progression to top pay, major improvements for city carrier assistants (CCAs), safe staffing, enforceable heat protections, an end to mandatory overtime and the reversal of route cuts. But none of these demands can be won apart from a fight against the destruction of the Postal Service itself.

Workers must demand the immediate publication of all USPS and NALC proposals, and full disclosure of what is being discussed in mediation. They should not consider any contract imposed through binding arbitration as legitimate. No agreement should be accepted unless workers have the right to study it, discuss it and vote on it.

Postal workers are told that strikes are illegal and that they must submit to arbitration. However the federal government and USPS management violate workers’ most basic rights with impunity. When postal worker Nick Acker was killed inside a mail sorting machine at

the Detroit Network Distribution Center in Allen Park, Michigan, OSHA fined USPS only \$26,481, a token penalty for the death of a worker.

The history of postal workers shows that rights are not won by accepting the limits imposed by Congress, management and the courts. In 1970, nearly 200,000 postal workers defied the strike ban in a rank-and-file rebellion against poverty wages and intolerable conditions. The walkout was not initiated by the union apparatus. It was forced from below by workers who refused to accept the framework designed to keep them powerless.

The government and the bureaucracy later reasserted control through the Postal Reorganization Act, which transformed the Post Office Department into the self-funded USPS. This was a disaster for workers and the public, setting the stage for more than five decades of cuts, speedup and demands that the Postal Service operate according to profit criteria. While maintaining the legal ban on strikes, it also created the framework for binding arbitration, which the postal unions present as part of the supposed “collective bargaining” rights won after 1970.

Workers will not win a single thing by accepting a framework designed to rob them of their rights and impose a management dictatorship. Rank-and-file committees, affiliated with the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, must be built in every station and facility to formulate demands, establish communication between workplaces and prepare collective action to defend jobs, wages, safety and universal service.

The Postal Service is not a private corporation. It is a vital public service built by generations of workers and relied on by hundreds of millions of people. Letter carriers have enormous social power. Without them, mail and package delivery stops. The issue is whether that power will remain trapped inside a fraudulent bargaining process, or whether workers will organize independently to use it.



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