

Third postal contract expires with no deal reached as APWU bureaucracy prepares sellout

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On Sunday, September 22, at 2:00 p.m. Pacific/5:00 p.m. Eastern, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online meeting to mobilize the broadest support in the working class for the 33,000 striking Boeing machinists. Register for the event by clicking here.

The contract between the US Postal Service (USPS) and American Postal Workers Union (APWU) expired on September 20, with APWU President Mark Dimondstein declaring last week that a deal will not be reached. Instead, the current contract will be automatically extended, including the hated “Penalty Overtime Exclusion” period that exploits workers throughout the holiday period without adequate compensation.

The American Postal Workers Union covers over 200,000 postal workers across four main crafts: Clerks, Maintenance, Motor Vehicle Services, and Support Services.

This means that three of the four postal unions are now working under expired contracts, even as USPS management is carrying out an historic attack on jobs and on postal services under the “Delivering for America” restructuring program. This seeks to transform the Postal Service into an automation-driven parcel delivery service—at the expense of vital mail services, lower-income and rural customers, and postal jobs—and ultimately to privatize it.

This underscores that rank-and-file postal workers are in a fight, not just against management, but sellout union bureaucrats. This is a global phenomenon. Postal workers around the world, including in the US as well as Canada, Britain, Germany and Australia have formed rank-and-file committees to fight the corporate-driven attack on postal services around the world.

The APWU bureaucracy has been completely silent during months of negotiations as it prepares another sellout agreement that meets none of workers’ demands. Dimondstein claims the bargaining team is fighting for “[an] all-career workforce, bridging the divisive multi-tier wage structure, improving

workplace safety, better staffing and job security.”

In a recent “negotiation update” he discussed nothing of substance and instead offered self-congratulations to the six-figure bureaucrats who are “laser focused” and “locking down” for “intense negotiations.” These theatrics aim to deceive workers that the bureaucrats fought as hard as they could when they ultimately deliver a betrayal and claim it is the best-and-final offer.

The reality is that for three years, DeJoy and USPS management have rammed through DFA without any more than token resistance from the APWU or other big-business postal unions. During that time, DeJoy has slowed mail service from 3 to 5 days, raised postage fees at the fastest rate in history, introduced mass worker surveillance, stolen wages from tens of thousands of workers, stood down the postal police during a crime wave against postal workers, and oversaw mass deaths caused by a lack of protections against COVID-19 and heat-related illness. The unions maintained a criminal silence.

Instead, Dimondstein championed the 2022 Postal Service Reform Act, which gutted the postal healthcare program, forfeit over \$5 billion in assets, and threw workers and their families onto Medicare.

The crux of the misnamed Delivering for America plan is to close part or all of hundreds of post offices and replace them with a network of regional high-automation processing and delivery hubs, much farther for mail customers and letter carriers to reach but easier for USPS’ big-business customers to offload truckloads of parcels, including rivals like UPS, FedEx, and Amazon that lack the rural delivery networks of the USPS. Carriers are not even credited for the much bulkier parcels in their “mail counts,” which determine wages.

Rural customers will not benefit, though, as DeJoy announced recently that rather than hiring more rural carriers to drive the far-longer routes, he would let rural delivery times slip by another 24 hours. As a postal worker recently told the *WSWS*, “DeJoy’s plan is not Delivering for America. It’s Delivering for Amazon... Period.”

When announcing DFA, DeJoy boasted that he would lay

off at least another 50,000 postal workers. The evidence has been ample. A new Regional Processing and Delivery Center (RPDC) opening in Charlotte, North Carolina was accompanied by 300 terminations of APWU workers. Similar layoffs occurred in Knoxville, Tennessee, where workers were told they could relocate to a new regional facility or find another job.

The rollout of the first four RDPCs has been accompanied by chaos, lost mail, and plummeting service levels. Customers in the Atlanta, Georgia area reported that prescription medicines and absentee ballots were lost when an automated hub launched earlier this year. Six months later, delivery times are nowhere near the national average. DeJoy “paused” new DFA rollouts through the end of the year after 26 US Senators demanded he halt the program in May and the Postal Regulatory Commission opened an investigation in June.

An August audit of RDPC rollouts by the USPS Office of Inspector General condemned management for these fiascos:

“[T]he Postal Service did not build on lessons learned from the launch of the Richmond RPDC, to address similar barriers to success such as staffing, training, and supervision. Specifically, the Postal Service experienced serious staffing challenges at the Atlanta RPDC and did not have management in place to supervise employees and operations at launch. Finally, the Postal Service’s policy did not require it to communicate its plans to close certain facilities in the Atlanta region to customers or other stakeholders.”

However, Dimondstein and the other union bureaucrats stand behind DFA. As the *World Socialist Website* noted in an analysis of the APWU’s July convention, “Dimondstein’s problem with DFA is not that it is part of an effort to destroy jobs and privatize the post office, but that its implementation has been riven with problems.”

In his recent negotiation update, Dimondstein stated, “I am hopeful that we can make progress, and a *voluntary agreement* can be reached [emphasis added].”

The “legal” alternative, under extreme anti-worker laws which rips up postal workers’ First Amendment-protected right to strike, is a deal imposed by binding arbitration. Far from waging a fight against these and other laws imposed by the two corporate parties, the postal unions have loyally enforced them for decades because they provide them with leverage to deal with the restive rank-and-file. In 1970, when postal workers conducted a national wildcat strike, the union bureaucrats reached a settlement trading wage increases for maintaining the strike ban.

In addition, other postal unions, notably the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) and National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA), have made extensive use of federal mediators to dictate Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that force wide-reaching policy changes without a vote by workers.

Postal workers are not the only ones facing off against government intervention. The most infamous recent use of federal mediators was during the 2022 rail contract, when a Biden Presidential Emergency Board negotiated a pro-business agreement. When rail workers voted it down, Congress intervened to block a legal strike and enforce the contract, which lacked even basic protections and sick leave.

East Coast dockworkers will see their contract expire at the end of the month and have threatened to strike, prompting significant speculation that the Biden administration will invoke the Taft-Hartley act to block it.

Dimondstein and the APWU convention also combined verbal support for a ceasefire in the Gaza genocide with a refusal to call out their own membership against war. Dimondstein recently summed up his “activism” in an interview with Truthout as “pressur[ing] the Biden administration to use their leverage to force a ceasefire and [deliver] massive humanitarian aid.” This is like asking an arsonist to put out their own fire.

Postal workers must take power into their own hands to reverse DFA, end the drive to privatize the post office, provide backpay to tens of thousands of carriers robbed of wages, end the use of surveillance technologies, end tiers, provide real job security, install air conditioning in vehicles to stop heat-related deaths, and utilize automation to reduce the work day, improve safety, and increase the quality of mail services.

This requires a break with the dead-end unions and the building of the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which formed one year ago this month. By uniting with other logistics workers, rail workers, dockworkers, and striking Boeing workers, we can stop the race-to-the-bottom policies of the mega-billionaires and their stooges in the Democratic and Republican parties and put an end to the bloodbath in the Middle East.

As the Committee wrote in its founding statement :

We must prepare action from below to assert the will of 635,000 career and non-career USPS workers to make sure our needs and interests take absolute priority, not the slash-and-burn policies of corporate-controlled politicians.



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