

Massive attack on postal workers' jobs

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Last week, United States Postal Service (USPS) Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced plans to eliminate 35,000 jobs by October 1 and close or consolidate 223 of 461 mail processing facilities beginning May 15.

This latest proposal, estimated to save \$2.1 billion a year, is part of a "larger, comprehensive plan, to reduce costs by \$20 billion by 2015." Donahoe has previously called for cutting 150,000 jobs over the next few years, the elimination of Saturday delivery, and, most recently, a one-day delay of local mail.

This attack by the USPS is in line with President Obama's approach to postal and federal workers, as well as the working class as a whole. Last September Obama proposed authorizing the Postal Service to eliminate Saturday delivery, restructure federal contributions into the Retiree Health Benefit plan, and refund the so-called \$6.9 billion "surplus" in the postal retirement fund. Cutting Saturday delivery will wipe out at least 40,000 postal jobs.

In November of 2010 Obama froze pay for most of the 2 million federal employees for two years. It is estimated that this will result in a loss of \$60 billion in pay and benefits over ten years.

Details have begun to emerge about the impact on employees of the closures planned by the Postal Service. While many craft employees still retain the no-layoff protection and the Postal Service states that the jobs will be cut through attrition, the closures will force numerous workers to quit or retire by offering transfers to facilities hundreds of miles away. This is the same method used to cut 110,000 postal workers from the workforce since 2007.

Basing his analysis on the Postal Service's statement, Alan Robinson of *Courier Express and Postal Observer* narrowed down an initial implementation of plant closings. The first round is to take place between May 15 and June 20, with a second round occurring between September 21 and September 30. "In order for the Postal Service to maximize its cost savings, it will try to close as many facilities as practically possible in June," Robinson said.

Clerks, maintenance employees, and Postal Vehicle Service drivers, all represented by the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), face the bulk of the job

displacements with nearly 22,000 positions eliminated. Over 11 percent of all APWU represented workers will be affected by these consolidations.

About one-third of mail processing jobs are to be eliminated in the Eastern Area, nearly 21 percent nationally. Over one-half, 57 percent, of maintenance positions nationwide will be cut. The Southwest and Eastern Areas will both lose over 80 percent of their maintenance employees.

The Eastern, Northeast and Southwest Areas will suffer the bulk of consolidations; affecting nearly 14,000 APWU represented employees. Despite the refusal of the USPS to release the study used to determine its consolidation plan, the above percentage can be used as a rough guide to the impact on mail handlers and non-union employees.

The jobs of 14,000 Postal Support Employees hired under the APWU contract signed last year are at risk since new hires under that contract do not have the no-layoff protection afforded to those hired under previous contracts.

Over 13,000 other employees, mail handlers, supervisors and administration, will find their positions eliminated or, with non-union employees, simply laid-off. The mail handlers union's web site stated that, "[S]tarting as soon as May 16, 2012...there may be several thousand Mail Handlers who will be notified of possible excessing."

With nearly every state losing at least one mail processing facility, the hardest hit will be California, with 14 plants facing consolidation; New York State will see twelve plants close and Illinois eight. Unemployment in California is currently 11.1 percent while Illinois has a 9.8 percent rate.

In New York, the Queens Processing and Distribution Center will close after May 15, according to the Postal Service, with the Brooklyn plant taking over most of its operation. Over 1,000 workers will be forced to relocate to other facilities. According to estimates by the union, only 200 of the 275 displaced mail handlers could transfer to either Brooklyn or Manhattan. This leaves 75 mail handlers without an option other than quitting, retiring, or relocating to another city. One can infer that similar ratios will apply to the rest of the Queens workforce.

Enrique De La Rosa is a member of Mail Handlers Local

300 at the Queens Processing and Distribution Center in Flushing, Queens that has been targeted for consolidation. He told the WSWs, “It looks like the Post Office is going down. I have 25 years, and I have a few more years until I retire. I am working a limited-hour day now. I am working three hours a day because I’ve been injured.

“They have already been moving people to Brooklyn. They started about a year ago, and I think it is about 100 people who they have already moved out to Brooklyn. What I heard was they said that they would be starting May 15. It may not be a totally done deal, but this is what they want. This is much faster than the October 1 date given in the USPS announcement.

“It is no good that Obama is doing this. The country’s economy is down. If they make these 35,000 job cuts in the mail handling facilities, it will be chaos. I have never seen anything like this in the Post Office in 25 years. If the union supported Obama, he should give consideration to our needs, but he doesn’t. It is always the same. The politicians promise something, and when they are elected they turn around and do the opposite.”

Sandy Paul, who also works at the Queens Processing and Distribution Center said, “I am one of the last groups hired at the Queens mail handling facility. We feel like the elimination of one day of mail service will take our jobs away.

“I am very surprised it is in Obama’s budget. It is a business, and I know that they say the cuts will have to come. But it is not right or good business to eliminate a day like Saturday and force people to have a three-day delivery delay. For me, people can’t wait for three-day deliveries. People can’t wait over a weekend for their checks or their medicines. It is not a good idea. This would probably cut jobs when we have the lowest workforce at this point in many years. So our service will be cut even more.

“I don’t think about what is going to happen here at Queens. I cannot think about it. I just pray. If you ask, I do think they will close this after May 15. There are not just the 700 jobs at the mail-handling center, but there are over 1,000 jobs that will be lost here counting the truck drivers, mail handlers, clerks, mechanics, maintenance and other crafts. This is just scary.”

A number of workers at New York City Processing and Distribution Centers spoke to the WSWs.

Victor Santos who works at the giant Morgan Center in Manhattan said, “It is upsetting that people who have worked all their lives in the Post Office are going to be laid off by people in high office sitting in plush suites.”

Annie Torrez who also works at Morgan, said, “I am very upset. Right now we have a no-layoff clause in our contract,

but from what I read they are laying off people in every craft and union.”

Jose Toledo, a mail handler at the Morgan complex, pointed out, “I think the APWU maintenance people have a no-layoff provision in their contract except for new hires after the latest contract. Then you can’t be laid off, you have to be reassigned. Of course then, you don’t know where or how far away you are going to be reassigned.

“The mail handlers’ contract is in arbitration now. We may lose our no-layoff guarantee there. Anybody who they hired after 2000, I believe, could be laid off. But we have never had postal layoffs before.

“The bad thing about the postal unions is they say we can’t go on strike.

“I voted for Obama in 2008 even though I am a Republican. But I won’t vote for either of those parties now. No matter which one you put in, both parties are for themselves. Both represent the rich.”

Ed Martinez, a maintenance worker at Morgan, explained to the WSWs, “It is a damn shame. Why are they doing it at this point in time? They said the economy was on the upswing. They said they wouldn’t transfer people.

“The union isn’t doing much. I don’t like to say it, but I am disappointed with them. I have heard that Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island will go. This is terrible. And it is not a good thing for the economy.

“It is outrageous that Obama is calling for the elimination of Saturday delivery. I thought he was doing all right. I voted for Obama, but now I think he is a terrible president. He is cutting my people out.

“The Post Office has been in existence for over 200 years. It is one of the first and longest running public services in American history. I am very disappointed, and I can’t vote for Obama.”



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