

“We’re becoming slaves”

Postal workers speak out against plant closures and speed-up

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The United States Postal Service (USPS) initiated the closure of 82 mail processing facilities nationwide this week. The cuts will impact 15,000 employees and add one to two days to the delivery time of 14 billion pieces of first-class mail each year.

Since 2006, the postal service has consolidated 305 mail-processing plants, shut down or reduced service at thousands of small post offices, dismantled over 23,000 delivery routes and slashed 212,000 jobs.

The number of non-career workers, lacking any health and retirement benefits, has increased by nearly 30 percent since 2012. During that period, USPS’ total operating expense has dropped by \$7.8 billion.

The postal service claims that these shutdowns were required due to a significant decline in the volume of first class mail, which has fallen by 35 percent over the past decade, even though demand for parcel shipping has increased with the growing popularity of Internet retail.

WSWS reporters spoke to postal workers at a post office in Davis, California. “We’re becoming slaves,” said Sharon, a letter carrier. “This used to be a good job, but they’re trying to claw us back to working at the minimum wage, while taking away our already meager pensions and benefits. With these most recent cutbacks that are supposed to start within days, they’re barely telling us anything. Everyone is interested and wants to know more, but they’ve barely said anything about it.”

Robert, also a letter carrier said, “It’s getting tougher every year, and they’re putting the full burden on the backs of workers. The holiday season is brutal. Today, I arrived for work at 6:30 AM, and now I’m leaving at 5:30 PM—that’s 11 hours. But they don’t pay us for 11 hours, they pay us for the seven hours that they

calculate it will take to deliver each truckload.”

Fernando, a letter carrier for 17 years in New York City, told the WSWs, “On a day like today, under the new process, I will need to get started an hour earlier,” adding that he expects overtime pay to be reduced, lunch breaks to be cut and expects to work six days a week.

“They always say they—the postal service, the union, the government, all of them—that they are going to do something” to help the workers, “but nothing gets done,” Fernando said. “It is a shame you work your whole life and this is what they leave you. Especially our union, they are working hand in hand with the government.”

These massive cuts would have been impossible without the collaboration of the four postal unions. Despite countless rallies, petitions to Congress and lobbying of the same Democratic and Republican politicians who are carrying out these attacks, not a single processing facility has avoided shutdown, and not a single job has been saved.

The WSWs spoke to letter carriers Pam and Gina at a USPS distribution facility near Portland, Oregon. “The biggest change in the last 30 years is the way you’re treated,” said Pam. “And a lot more work,” Gina added.

Pam continued, “More work for less money and the union is in bed with the Post Office. The union talks like management—they go into the postmaster’s office first and get their plan straight” before informing the workers of anything.

“Everybody is way over their evaluated hours, especially since we took work with Amazon. And the union is no help with that. We are constantly being told

we have to make our evaluation.”

Gina added, “I’m the same way on all of that. They assigned me to a sorting case that is too high for me, because I have limited range of motion in my arms, which I have a doctor’s note for. I worked for a year like that, and then I had to have surgery.”

Asked what has been the effect of fewer employees and more work, Gina said, “I have told management that they will have more injuries and more wrecks, and that is what is happening. At every safety meeting, we are told of more wrecks and that we need to be more careful. We don’t have enough time to do all the scanning and deliveries and all the parcels.”



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