

Lawsuit reveals that nearly 44,000 US Postal Service workers have been fired after being injured on the job

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The United States Postal Service (USPS) has fired or forced out nearly 44,000 employees who were injured on the job since 2006 through its National Reassessment Process (NRP), according to a class action lawsuit brought before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The class action suit is currently open and continues to process claims from approximately 28,000 victimized postal workers. According to the nonprofit organization ProPublica the EEOC ruled that the NRP “illegally discriminated against injured workers by creating a hostile work environment, taking away disability accommodations and revealing workers’ confidential medical information” in 2015 and 2017.

Including the NRP case, the USPS estimates that it may owe up to \$178 million in potential liabilities for pending employment claims. The USPS has fought back against the claims brought forward by the lawsuit, contesting each worker’s claim individually, alleging that injured workers never provided enough proof that they had disabilities or were actually harmed as a result of the NRP.

The NRP was utilized by the USPS from 2006–2011. The program sought to significantly cut labor costs for USPS, which faced increasing operating costs from fuel price increases, decreasing revenue from reductions in the use of priority services like first-class mail, as well as increasing competition for the delivery of packages and urgent mail from giant logistics corporations like UPS and FedEx. Labor costs made up 80 percent of the USPS’ operating costs at the time that the NRP was rolled out.

Former USPS workers in the NRP class action suit allege that they were discriminated against after

showing proof that they had been injured at work. The suit alleges that the USPS routinely harassed and discriminated against injured workers and refused to provide reasonable accommodations to workers who had become disabled as a result of their injuries.

The lawsuit also alleges that workers were fired after being moved to less physically demanding jobs, even if they provided written instructions to human resources from medical professionals restricting the type of work they were able to safely perform with their conditions.

Workers allege that they were let go from their new positions when the USPS told them that there was not enough work in the new positions to keep the workers employed. Workers in the class action suit claim that this is false and that other workers had to speed up to cover their heavy workloads after they were fired.

The plight of USPS workers bears striking similarities to the experience of workers at tech and logistics giant Amazon, owned by ultra-billionaire Jeff Bezos, who are routinely victimized, harassed, spied upon, fired and denied workers compensation for injuries suffered on the job.

According to the US Labor Department, postal workers accounted for only one-fifth of all federal employees in 2019, yet were disproportionately injured on the job, experiencing half of all workplace illness and injuries among federal employees.

Mail sorters must routinely squat and lift heavy bins of mail over 70 pounds, which can cause knee, back and rotator cuff injuries. Carriers also risk injury from lifting heavy bins, squatting, repeatedly getting in and out of mail trucks, walking up and down stairs, and walking to deliver mail in inclement weather, putting them at greater risk for slips and falls as well as joint

injuries.

The grievances expressed in the lawsuit are the result of the subordination of the US Postal Service to the relentless demands of the capitalist profit system in which it operates, and these conditions cannot be eliminated for all workers through the capitalist legal system. USPS workers have had their jobs and living standards under attack since the 1970s as a massive shift of wealth from the working class to the corporate ruling class was underway.

The USPS is an independent agency of the federal government that receives no tax dollars, and is the second-largest employer in the US behind Walmart. After the 1970 postal workers strike against the federal government, the USPS was formed to replace the US Postal Department, which was funded by Congress, with an organization that was run like a business, but which is not a government-owned corporation. The US Postal Department had been a cabinet department of the executive branch since 1872.

In recent decades, the USPS has faced enormous funding cuts. It experienced five straight years of operating losses between 2011–2016 with the majority of its deficit coming from \$5.8 billion in accruals of unpaid mandatory retiree health insurance payments. Due to the increasing use of email and the internet for correspondence and document delivery, the volume of first-class mail processed by the USPS declined by 43 percent in 2017 from its peak in 2001.

The USPS increased its productivity each year from 2000–2007 mainly through automation, route optimization and through facility consolidation. In July 2011, under Democratic President Barack Obama, the USPS announced plans to close 3,700 post offices across the US. This was met with backlash from the public, and the following year it announced it would instead keep rural post offices open with reduced retail hours, cutting back on labor costs and limiting essential services provided to the millions of people.

In December 2011 the USPS announced that it planned to close more than half—252 out of a total of 461—of its mail processing centers, eliminating 28,000 positions and reducing the delivery of overnight first-class mail. The same year, several media outlets began to speculate that the USPS was going out of business.

The four unions which officially represent the postal workers—the American Postal Workers Union, National

Association of Letter Carriers, National Postal Mail Handlers Union and National Rural Letter Carriers' Association—have not lifted a finger to mobilize workers to oppose these attacks, including the loss of over 250,000 post office jobs since 1999—an almost 28 percent reduction in its workforce. The USPS now employs around 630,000 workers compared to 900,000 in 1999.

Neither did the unions make any effort to unite USPS workers with their class brothers and sisters across the border during the 2018 strike of 50,000 Canadian postal workers, who were also fighting against a brutal profit-driven work regimen where real wages had fallen and understaffing led to speedup and heavy workloads that caused an accident rate among postal workers to be five times that of the average rate for federally regulated industries.

Republican President Donald Trump has unleashed new threats to privatize the USPS in recent years, against which thousands of postal workers in cities across the US protested in 2018. If such draconian moves ever go forward, it will only be thanks to the previous Democratic and Republican administrations which sanctioned cuts to the USPS and to the postal workers unions which have been complicit in these attacks.

Postal workers in the US and worldwide cannot allow their struggles to be trapped within the realm of the labor unions and capitalist parties any longer. A real socialist and internationalist strategy is needed to take control of communications infrastructure from the corporate ruling class and to place it into the hands of the working class worldwide.



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