

“People will not know what they lost until it is gone”

Workers voice opposition to privatization of US Postal Service

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We encourage all workers who wish to join in the defense of the US Postal Service through the formation of rank-and-file committees to contact the World Socialist Web Site at contact@wsws.org.

Postal workers and broad sections of the American population have responded with outrage to the leaked memos from United States Postal Service (USPS) management which reveal plans for the accelerated privatization of the Postal Service and their impact on working conditions.

The first leaked memo outlined plans for “immediate, lasting, and impactful changes in our operations and in our culture” for “the health and stability of the Postal Service.” The changes aim to cut labor costs by ending late or extra trips by carriers, essentially eliminating the overtime hours that many workers require to fulfill daily package and mail deliveries.

These strict rules outline the restructuring of the federal agency, increasing the workloads of mail carriers and sorters to complete high volumes within a shorter amount of time. The changes would increase penalties for workers who make mistakes while loading trucks or completing their delivery route, and would impose a regime of tight oversight and harassment by management.

If a large pile of mail is not sorted and delivered within the timeframe set by USPS, it simply will not be delivered on time. This new policy will increase delivery times for mail and packages, making USPS the slower mailing option compared to its private competitors like Amazon, United Parcel Services (UPS) and Federal Express (FedEx).

The effects of this change are already being felt by workers around the country. Mail carriers in Maine recently reported that Portland Postmaster James Thornton ordered workers to prioritize Amazon packages

first before USPS parcels.

Opposition is growing among postal workers and wider sections of the working class to these attacks on the postal service. The *World Socialist Web Site*’s previous report this week on the threats to privatize USPS was widely read and circulated on social media.

Brandon, a stower, wrote in to tell the WSWs: “From what I have heard, if the Postal Service is privatized it will affect the rural areas and inner city, as they may only get mail three days a week. It will cost a lot more as a private company will charge more for the last mile, and the sanctity of the mail will not be as secure. People will not know what they lost until it is gone.”

The management of USPS, now headed by former logistics firm CEO and Trump “mega-donor” Louis DeJoy, is creating the conditions for fully privatizing the company by both increasing the workload for its workforce and making the company less competitive. This double whammy serves to essentially bankrupt USPS while demonstrating the willingness to restructure the workplace, forcing a takeover or selloff of the company.

In addition, the privatization of USPS, and the resulting decline of postal worker’s wages and benefits, would provide a downward pressure on wages for workers in all sections of the logistics industry, such as United Parcel Service (UPS), Federal Express (FedEx), and Amazon.

Joaquin, a postal worker in New York, spoke to the WSWs about the implications of privatization for workers and democratic rights. He explained how postal workers deliver many essential goods to millions in the United States, guaranteed at a flat rate no matter where one lives, including “the essential lifesaving medicine that elderly use.”

DeJoy’s new plans are “going to cause chaos,” he said. “It’s so much mail that has to go out. Trying to hold mail

back, there's going to be a series of bottlenecks that are going to have to release themselves. There's going to be an explosion somewhere."

Joaquin expanded on the concern that the US government and executives want to "allow a few businesses to control the mail, how does that make sense? You're infringing on people's freedom."

"This is an election year. This is a strategy to hold back votes, to be able to manipulate them," he said. He also noted that the new Postmaster General DeJoy is a long-standing Trump supporter and was nominated by Trump.

The stepped-up drive toward privatization takes place in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which postal workers have been forced to work in unsafe conditions that place them at a high risk for contracting and spreading the virus. The latest statistics show that 5,400 postal workers have tested positive for COVID-19, and dozens have died. As bad as they are, these statistics underestimate the scope of the virus' spread given the lack of testing and the concealment of data by USPS management.

Opposition is mounting among workers to the threats to their lives and livelihoods by the USPS Board of Governors and political establishment. This opposition can only be advanced if workers take the struggle into their own hands and follow the lead of autoworkers by building rank-and-file safety committees. These committees will unite with one another across the country and develop a broad working class movement to confront the powerful social interests that are dictating USPS policy.

The struggle that must be waged to defend USPS stands in contrast to the proposal of the four American postal worker unions, which have enforced the commands of Wall Street upon postal workers over several decades of sellout contracts.

In a letter from July 20, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) wrote that it "vehemently opposes any actions that slow down and undermine mail processing, delivery, and retail services and thus drives business and revenue away from the Postal Service... United with each other and the people of the country we will defeat those who aim to dismantle and sell off the public Postal Service."

"We all have a role to play reaching out to our families, neighbors, labor and community organizations, and local political representatives to fight for our jobs and our service," the message stated, then inviting workers to call senators in an "Action Day" on July 23 and increase

pressure upon Congress to pass \$25 billion in COVID-19 emergency relief for the Postal Service.

In other words, according to the unions the only thing that workers can do is appeal to the same Democratic and Republican Party politicians who have carried out decades of attacks on the postal service.

Both parties joined the Trump administration in passing the CARES Act, which allowed for an unprecedented bailout of Wall Street and the major corporations with trillions of dollars. Some Democratic Party politicians have recently sought to pose as defenders of USPS as part of their election-year calculations, knowing full well that the Republican-controlled Senate or Trump would block any token and inadequate funding packages they would pass.

Workers must reject their subordination to the Democratic Party by the unions. The needs of workers for safe work conditions, regular COVID-19 testing, full-time jobs with decent pay, and even the democratic right to mail delivery services are coming into direct conflict with the profit interests of the corporate and financial elite, represented by Louis DeJoy and Donald Trump.

Postal workers will find an immense source of support among logistics workers at Amazon, UPS, FedEx and other companies; postal workers in Japan and the United Kingdom, where the postal sectors have been privatized already; and other sections of the working class all over the world, who confront the same deteriorating conditions as the global capitalist economy prioritizes profits over human lives.

The essential services provided by logistics workers must not be subordinated to the profit interests of the rich. Instead, USPS and all the major logistics and delivery corporations should be converted into truly public utilities, democratically controlled by the workers themselves.



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