

“This is war, and we have to fight”

USPS workers speak out against privatization drive

Our reporters
8 August 2020

Opposition is growing among postal workers to the ongoing efforts of the ruling class to privatize the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the increasingly unbearable work regime.

On Friday, Louis DeJoy—the newly appointed postmaster general, former corporate executive and Trump “mega-donor”—attempted to deny that he was pursuing privatization, while at the same time voicing his commitment to “organizational realignment” and “operational efficiency,” telling the Postal Service Board of Governors meeting, “We are at the beginning of a transformative process.”

“Our financial position is dire, stemming from substantial declines in mail volume, a broken business model and a management strategy that has not adequately addressed these issues,” he continued.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke to postal workers about their work conditions and the privatization drive. The names of the workers have been changed in order to protect their identity from management.

James, a postal worker in Pennsylvania, said, “I’ve honestly been surprised by how few people at work are talking about the new postmaster general. I’ve literally only heard one coworker talking about it so far. This might partly be because the city carrier union (which is my union) has been completely silent on a national and local level, but also because the pandemic has left us so short-handed.”

“Many people are working two weeks at a time without a day off and around 12-13 hours a day — one new guy just worked 21 days in a row. A lot of carriers seem too tired to even think about the future right now, and I suspect it won’t occur to them until Trump’s

appointing starts affecting them directly in terms of management trying to cut labor costs.”

When asked about what postal workers need during the pandemic, James responded: “Testing would be a huge relief to many — though I think we understand the current limitations of how difficult tests are to attain. Nonetheless, we are working in extremely close quarters until we leave the office every morning, and nobody knows who’s carrying what.”

“What we need in the long term is a little less clear,” he said. “I know the DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] Labor Commission is holding a call this week for USPS employees. The goal seems to be pressuring Congress to support the post office, which is simply not enough. The postal unions already have their own infrastructure in place to lobby congress, and it has gotten us nowhere. “There is a lot of incentive for capital to privatize the USPS and the new postmaster general may only accelerate this process, and community support for postal workers will be crucial if we’re ever forced to take action.”

Richard, a worker in the Morgan facility in New York, described the rise of worker deaths, which has been deliberately hidden by management from workers.

“I would say I know six workers who have died from COVID-19 at Morgan. I know a few of the people who have died. I know one coworker who had a locker close to mine. He had a minor accident with his van one day. They took him to the hospital. They released him from the hospital, and he decided he would come back to work the next day. He died on his way in to work. Most of the people who passed away had underlying conditions. My friend was 67. He was going to retire in a year and move back to Trinidad. He used to be a

smoker, but then quit. I was proud of him for that.”

Referring to the recent George Floyd protests, Richard said, “I have seen the protests. I haven’t joined because I am working 12 hours a day. The working class needs to take action. Workers should defend the protesters. The protesters are a voice for the people trying to be heard.”

“I knew our society was moving along toward dictatorship a long time ago with Bush. They are trying to take away our rights and rule by martial law.”

When reporters had asked about USPS’ ongoing funding crisis, he said, “About three weeks ago, the post office got rid of the full-time outside cleaners they brought in for about two months to clean the Morgan facility to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. I called them the quarantine people, and they were always working and cleaning. This was needed for us because we are essential workers.

“We work on four floors of our nine-floor building. We used to work on many more of the floors. They washed the handrails on the escalators. They cleaned the doorknobs everyone used. They cleaned the tables in the cafeteria and the chairs. They used to clean the vending machines, and all the knobs and buttons on the elevators. They were doing a good job, I thought. Nobody bothered them. There were about five on my shift, and they were always working. They worked on other shifts as well, but about three weeks ago they were let go.”

“Then they tried to get us to do that work. A supervisor told one coworker to start doing the quarantine work after the others left. She did it on her overtime for two hours, but she couldn’t do all that work. So she started doing it on her eight-hour shift, and then she couldn’t get her work done. Then she told them she couldn’t do it. Now no one is doing this important health and safety work.”

“The nearby Farley post office has been sold. The buildings that are being built around the Morgan post office here are very expensive. It is near the new Hudson Yards project, and that may determine the outcome of our building here.”

Expressing his support for the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, he concluded, “There is nothing good in privatization. I don’t do anything the Republicans or the Democrats say, and I don’t vote. I am down with what you are talking about. The history

of the Democrats, Republicans and all of them, is they are just making promises. This is what living is like now, and it is getting worse. This is war, and we have to fight.”

If you’re a USPS worker and want to share your story or discuss the formation of rank-and-file safety committees to fight the pandemic, contact the World Socialist Web Site today.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact