

USPS centralizes leadership as step towards privatization and possible election fraud

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The United States Postal Service (USPS), under the leadership of Postmaster General, former logistics firm CEO and major Trump donor Louis DeJoy, announced an unprecedented restructuring of the organization's top management.

The announcement comes after the July 10 memo signaling the privatization of the USPS; with the elimination of overtime and the deliberate decision to delay mail, with "more to come."

More indeed has come. After post offices around the country reported reduction of hours, the USPS released a statement on August 7 announcing the reassignment or displacement of 23 postal executives, including the two top officials in day-to-day operations. USPS's operations will also be consolidated into three "business operating units," which are:

- Retail and Delivery Operations, responsible for "accepting and delivering mail"
- Logistics and Processing Operations, for processing and moving mail and packages to the delivery units
- Commerce and Business Solutions, for leveraging "infrastructure to enable growth"

The full implications of the restructuring are not yet apparent; however, it is clear that this is a move to centralize authority for the operations of the USPS around DeJoy. DeJoy is a major Trump donor who has given over \$2 million in campaign contributions. In the statement, USPS writes:

As part of the modified organizational structure, logistics and mail processing operations will report into the new Logistics and Processing Operations organization separate from existing area and district reporting structures. This includes all mail processing facilities and local transportation network offices. Splitting operations into these two organizations is designed to allow for improved focus and clear communication channels.

An institution founded during the American Revolution in 1775, predating even the Declaration of Independence, the United States Postal Service is responsible for key democratic functions. It has a government-mandated monopoly over the delivery of lettered mail, including the responsibility to deliver mail-in ballots, helping ensure the right to vote for all US citizens. Under conditions of a devastating pandemic which has claimed the lives of over 162,000 people in the US and 728,000 globally, mail-in ballots will become the primary means of voting (if elections are even held).

The creation of a new Logistics and Processing Operations organization with separate reporting structures casts even further doubt on the integrity of the voting process. Trump has already made statements challenging the legitimacy of the mail-in balloting process and has repeatedly floated the possibility of postponing the election. But the attack on democratic rights is also being carried out in different ways by Trump's Democratic Party opponents, who have effectively denied third-party candidates the right to appear on the ballot in federal lawsuits filed in Michigan and California by the Socialist Equality Party.

In addition to the restructuring announcement, the Postal Service has put a management hiring freeze in place and is pushing early retirement for nonunion postal employees.

While the USPS management claims that it is instituting these changes to make the organization "more efficient," reports around the country indicate otherwise.

The slashing of overtime, lowering of postal office hours, and decisions to delay mail have led to complaints being filed by residents around the country, with some reports indicating that people have had their mail delayed, often containing essential items like medicine, for weeks. *Connecting Vets* reported that nearly 100 veterans and caregivers, along with dozens of Veterans Administration employees, and others, confirmed that Postal Service issues are delaying veterans' medications.

In addition, reports are coming in from Michigan, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Mail carriers told the

Philadelphia Inquirer that “they are overwhelmed, working long hours yet still unable to finish their routes. Offices are so short-staffed that when a carrier is out, a substitute is often not assigned to their route.”

“We don’t know who these people are. What is their experience in logistics and how the post office runs?” Ali, a postal worker, said to the *World Socialist Web Site*. “He just appointed three of his own people. Just like our president appointed him to slow and sabotage the mail vote in November. I guess time will tell. All these changes that he’s already done are hurting us so bad, especially delaying the express, which is the most profitable service we have. People will call and get their money back if we don’t deliver it on certain days. Or they will go to our competitors.”

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) told reporters Wednesday that he and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) had a “heated discussion” with the postmaster general over the recent developments. The meeting comes a day after the House Oversight and Reform Committee announced that DeJoy agreed to testify at a Sept. 17 hearing focused on USPS operations.

More than 130 members of the House, mostly Democrats, have signed on to a letter demanding measures in the final pandemic spending bill that would roll back the operational changes DeJoy instituted, and give the agency \$25 billion in one-time funding. However, this proposal is dead on arrival, as it would never pass the Republican-controlled Senate and would be vetoed by Trump even if it were to pass.

The truth is that the drive to systematically defund and privatize the USPS is a bipartisan affair. Under Democratic President Bill Clinton, the USPS began contracting out services. Under Democratic President Barack Obama, the Postal Service shut down over 3,700 post offices around the country.

Moreover, the current Board of Governors of the USPS, as the WSWs recently reported, is composed of former corporate executives who are financial supporters of both parties, as well as former trade union advisers who support the Democratic Party. The two most recent appointees by the Trump administration, Donald M. Moak (a longtime Democratic Party donor and former member of the AFL-CIO executive council) and William D. Zollars (a corporate executive whose private transportation firm YRC Global faces allegations of fraud) were unanimously approved by the Senate; the other members had strong bipartisan support as well.

Much of the leadership of the USPS has a direct financial incentive to privatize the Post Office. As a financial disclosure filed with the Office of Government Ethics revealed, the Postmaster General and his wife own between \$30.1 million and \$75.3 million in assets in USPS

competitors or contractors.

Privatization of the USPS, as the experience in Europe and Japan demonstrates, would mean the elevation of shipping costs, reduced mail delivery access, and further degradation of working conditions and wages. A postal worker in Britain submitted a statement to the WSWs recently, pointing out that since privatization of the Royal Mail in 2013: “Parcel volumes are up 64 percent according to Royal Mail’s financial results, increasing the already heavy workload faced by postal workers. Royal Mail has given massive amounts of money to shareholders. In the last seven years since privatisation, the hedge funds and other significant shareholders controlling Royal Mail have extracted over £1 billion in dividends and other remunerations.”

Since it was privatized, Royal Mail has increased the proportion of 20-to-25-hour contract jobs and has created a two-tier workforce. Privatization was made possible, the postal worker notes, through the support of the British postal workers trade union, the CWU. In the midst of COVID-19, the CWU called off strikes approved by over 94.5 percent of the members, even as it admitted that over 20,000 workers will eventually be let go.

For USPS workers, the unions have played a similar role, presiding over the reduction of over 300,000 full-time positions since 1999. During COVID-19, as management hides COVID-19 infections and deaths from workers and as privatization moves forward at full speed, the unions have done virtually nothing.

In defense of democratic rights, to halt privatization, and protect their safety, postal workers must break from their unions and the Democratic Party and take matters into their own hands by forming independent rank and file committees, as autoworkers have done. The *World Socialist Web Site* will offer support and guidance every step of the way.



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