The Democrats and Republicans: Two wolves hunting the United States Postal Service

Shuvu Batta
15 August 2020

The move to privatize the US Postal Service led by Trump and the Postmaster General, top Trump donor Louis DeJoy, has sparked massive outrage throughout the United States. A petition to "Save the USPS" on Change.org has over 1.2 million signatures as of this writing. Another petition calling on Congress and the White House to fully fund the USPS on Moveon.org has over 425,000 signatures.

The United States Postal Service is by far the most popular government agency, with a Pew Research survey released last year reporting that over 91 percent of respondents hold a favorable view. It delivers mail, at a flat rate, to unprofitable locations such as rural areas, delivering essential items at relatively low cost in comparison to its competitors. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the USPS and the service it provides has been rendered far more essential.

However, at this critical time, USPS has centralized its leadership around DeJoy, which puts a question mark on the integrity of mail-in balloting in the November election, and delayed mail delivery nationwide. People around the country report delays in shipments of essential items, such as medicine, for as long as several weeks. VICE has recently reported that the USPS is removing mail sorting machines from facilities around the country without any official explanation or reason given.

However, the drive to privatize the USPS is not solely an objective of the Republican Party and the Trump administration. The Democratic Party, the other wing of the capitalist political system, is equally responsible.

In a recent statement, DeJoy said that the problems of the USPS stemmed "from substantial declines in mail volume, a broken business model and a management strategy that has not adequately addressed these issues." However, the truth is that the USPS has been sabotaged by its leadership, by both its Board of Governors and the political leaders in Congress and the White House responsible for nominating and electing them.

The Postal Service's budget crisis started in 2006, with the landmark Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act passed by the Republican George W. Bush administration. The act required the prefunding of the health benefits of retirees, a requirement no other entity, public or private, has to make. This required putting away an extra $5.6 billion per year, strongly contributing to the USPS' loss of over $62.4 billion between 2007 and 2016.

The bill was passed with a bipartisan consensus. It was co-sponsored by Republican John M. McHugh of New York and two Democrats, Henry Waxman of California and Danny K. Davis of Illinois. It was passed almost unanimously in the House of Representatives with 201 Democrats voting Yes and one abstaining. Among Republicans, 208 voted Yes, 20 No, and two abstained. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, then a member of the House of Representatives, voted Yes. It passed the Senate, then composed of 44 Democrats and 55 Republicans, without a roll call vote through "unanimous consent." A direct consequence of this action was the reduction of the USPS workforce by over 65,000 postal workers in 2009 and the start of yearly budget deficits.

Democratic President Barack Obama continued and accelerated the assault on USPS workers.

In 2011, under the pretext of reducing the federal budget deficit, the Obama administration outlined a plan to restructure the Retiree Health Benefit Fund and "refund" $6.8 Billion from the fund to the federal government. In response, The American Postal Workers Union ignored the attack and announced in a

© World Socialist Web Site

statement, “APWU Praises Obama’s effort, but Long-Term Solution is Needed.”

During Obama's term in office, the USPS was run by a largely vacant Board of Governors with a Republican majority inherited from the Bush Administration. By law no more than five out of the nine governors can be of the same political party. In his first term, Obama's appointees were ignored by the Democratic-controlled Senate. In his second term, the Obama administration stopped nominating appointees and by the time he left office all nine positions in the board of governors was left vacant, essentially allowing the Trump administration to shape the leadership of the Post Service as it pleased.

During his term, over 3,700 post offices were shut down and over 150,000 career employee positions were cut. The real estate firm CBRE, headed by Richard Blum, the husband of California Democratic Senator Diane Feinstein, won the contract to sell off the post offices.

President Trump has further accelerated the attack on the post office in an unprecedented manner, but enjoys bipartisan support. The latest nominees for board of governors were composed of figures of both parties and were unanimously approved.

The “opposition” offered by the Democratic Party against Trump and DeJoy’s attacks on USPS workers has been of a purely verbal character. The Democrats have signed on to a letter demanding measures in the final spending bill that would give the agency $25 billion in one-time spending, but this proposal would never pass the Republican-controlled Senate and would be vetoed by Trump even if it were to pass. The same is true of new legislation introduced Wednesday in the House of Representatives that aims to reverse the recent changes instituted by DeJoy. Democrats showed no such concern for the future of the post office when they controlled both houses of Congress during the beginning of Obama’s first term.

The reality is that the dictatorial powers exercised by Trump, not only in denying funding for the postal service and its ability to provide universal mail-in voting during a pandemic, but also in carrying out police-state measures in cities across the US and spearheading the back-to-school drive, have been based on the groundwork laid by the previous administration of the Democratic Party.

Alongside the dismantling of the USPS, President Obama proclaimed the right of the president to assassinate American citizens without due process, killing three US citizens in drone strikes, expanded the militarization of police departments, and presided over an unprecedented transfer of wealth from the bottom 90 percent of the population to the top 10, only recently to be surpassed by Trump.

The Democratic Party is attempting to direct the opposition brewing among postal workers and all sections of workers against Trump toward the election of former vice president Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris. Biden recently tweeted, “We can’t let Donald Trump destroy the Postal Service.”

But Biden served in the Obama administration, which spearheaded its own attacks not just on postal workers but on autoworkers and the entire working class in the aftermath of the 2009 recession. This has not prevented the APWU from endorsing Biden, demonstrating its role as a tool of management and political prop for the Democratic Party.

The fight to halt the privatization of the United States Postal Service requires instead the mobilization of the working class completely independent of the Democratic Party and its trade union appendages. This requires the formation of rank-and-file safety committees of postal workers, connected with teachers, autoworkers and all other workers, toward the movement of a general strike .

We urge all postal workers that agree with this article to reach out to us, and to organize their fellow co-workers in their workplaces. We will assist you every step of the way.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site