

US postal workers march against job cuts in Charlotte, North Carolina

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Take up the fight for rank-and-file control! Contact the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing USPSRankandFileCommittee@gmail.com today. Alternatively, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.

Postal workers marched Tuesday in Charlotte, North Carolina to protest the layoff of 308 people at locations around the area, which were announced earlier this month.

The workers are post office clerks in the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) Local 375, which called the demonstration. Workers marched along a highway near the city's airport, ending at a local mail processing center.

That the APWU felt compelled to call the march shows the immense anger which is building up among rank-and-file postal workers. The job cuts in Charlotte are part of a national restructuring program, misnamed "Delivering for America," which is slashing wages and jobs to the bone and reorganizing the Post Office along Amazon-style lines, consolidating its operations into a smaller number of large distribution centers. Thousands of local post offices are to be closed under this program, over 100,000 delivery routes redrawn and at least 50,000 jobs cut, mainly by forcing workers to quit or take early retirement.

The pro-business restructuring is being led by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, appointed during the Trump administration but enjoying broad bipartisan support. Its aim is to finally realize longstanding goals to privatize the Post Office entirely, which has endured decades of cuts under both Democratic and Republican majorities in Washington since being spun off from a cabinet-level department of the federal government to a publicly owned corporation in the 1970s.

In the metropolitan Charlotte area, operations will be consolidated into Regional Package Distribution Centers (RPDCs) in Gastonia and Greensboro, which will conduct much of the work being performed now in area post

offices. These are part of the first wave of RPDCs which are coming online around the country. A total of 60 RPDCs are planned under "Delivering for America," consolidating operations of 400 existing facilities and eliminating another 200.

The Gastonia RPDC, a 620,000 square foot facility about 27 miles outside of Charlotte, will centralize thousands of city carrier routes and shift the carriers from hundreds of post offices to Gastonia.

One of the central cost-cutting features of the move to the Amazon-style hub-and-spoke system centered around RPDCs is reducing the number of clerks in post offices. Clerks service the retail windows and provide support to the carriers. Without the carriers, fewer clerks will be required at the post offices that will remain in operation. Ultimately, the redesign of the processing and distribution of mail will replace a significant number of post office jobs with gig-work casual employees, similar to nonunion Amazon, or at UPS, where the Teamsters union has long allowed the company to use primarily part-time labor to staff its warehouses.

However, as postal workers from around the country have resoundingly reported, their unions are working in close cooperation with USPS to make working conditions intolerable for them. As reported extensively by the *World Socialist Web Site*, punitive evaluation systems have been imposed on rural and city carriers. The Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS) purports to ensure the evaluation process by which pay for different routes is determined along "industrial engineering principles." As the WSWS reported in May, the implementation of RRECS resulted in massive wage cuts for two thirds of rural carriers, often from \$10 to \$20 thousand a year.

Conditions are no better for city carriers, who now toil under the watchful eye of the Technology Integrated Alternative Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process

(TIAREAP). This electronic monitoring system tracks their every movement, and is used to discipline them for “stationary events,” which might mean a carrier has stopped in front of a bank of mailboxes at an apartment building or paused for a drink of water.

The tech-driven speedup has already resulted in preventable tragedy. In Dallas, Texas 36-year veteran city carrier Eugene Gates, Jr. died of heatstroke after being disciplined, for the first time in his career, over a “stationary event.”

The union bureaucracies, however, while posturing occasionally against job cuts, are full partners in the restructuring. Significantly, the RRECS took effect after being signed off on by the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA). The National Association of Letter Carriers, which covers city carriers, has been holding talks with the Post Office on a new contract for months behind a total information blackout, in spite of the fact that the contract talks are taking place amid demands by the USPS for historic cuts. Moreover, the unions are doing next to nothing to warn their members about the historic attacks being planned under “Delivering for America.”

Tuesday’s march in Charlotte was limited by the APWU to appeals to lawmakers to intervene on behalf of postal workers. In comments to the press Tuesday, APWU state president Tony McKinnon framed the restructuring in Charlotte as simply the result of poor management and “more trouble than it’s worth,” as the *Queen City News* paraphrased him as saying. “They’ve done it in Atlanta and in Richmond, and it’s not working,” he said, leaving open the possibility that the union and management could come together to find a solution that does “work.”

Postmaster General DeJoy has not simply “gone rogue,” but is carrying out policies which have support from both big-business parties. Even though he was appointed under Trump and faced scrutiny in slowing down mail delivery in the lead-up to the 2020 election—which Trump sought to overturn by falsely claiming widespread fraud in the mail-in ballots—Biden’s appointees to the USPS Board of Governors have seen fit to keep DeJoy on the job. This is in spite of the fact that DeJoy has a flagrant conflict of interest in his involvement in firms that do business with USPS. “Delivering for America” was announced two months after Biden took office.

Six Democratic senators, including Bernie Sanders, earlier issued a call for a reprieve to cuts to rural carriers’ wages due to the RRECS system. These lawmakers are

posturing as friends of workers but played central roles last year in securing a ban on a rail strike last year, which Biden had sought from Congress. In the end, workers were given a brief two weeks before the cuts devastated their income with no further intervention on their behalf from Washington.

In other words, postal workers face a three-pronged conspiracy involving the post office management, the trade union bureaucracy and both political parties. To fight back, they must organize themselves independently, rejecting any illusion that any of these co-conspirators can be pressured into fighting for workers, instead basing themselves on a strategy of rank-and-file control and an appeal to workers across the country and the world for support.

This is what the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee was founded this month to accomplish. Its aim, as explained in its founding statement, is “to organize ourselves, put forward our own program of demands, and place rank-and-file workers in every position critical to our job security, safety, wages, bargaining and so on. We must prepare action from below to assert the will of 635,000 career and non-career USPS workers to make sure our needs and interests take absolute priority, and not the slash-and-burn policies of corporate-controlled politicians.”

The committee continued: “In founding the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, we are taking the first step in organizing that fight. We call upon our coworkers to join us and build up a powerful network linking rank-and-file workers at every station and distribution center across the United States. This broadly democratic structure, controlled by workers ourselves and not the union apparatus, will provide us with means to share information that is being withheld from us, to freely discuss strategy, and to coordinate joint actions across the country.”

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