

Inspector General's reports find massive issues in rollout of "Delivering for America" restructuring of US Postal Service

Jane Wise
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Postal workers: What are conditions like at your facility? Contact the WSWWS by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On March 28, the United States Postal Service's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released the results of its audit of the Richmond, Virginia Regional Processing and Delivery Center (RPDC).

Since its opening last summer, the Richmond region has experienced unprecedented disruptions in mail service. This has not only disrupted service in an area of more than 1.3 million people, but has also endangered lives. Earlier this year, it was discovered that hundreds of colon cancer screening samples mailed last July arrived at their final destination six months later in January.

On April 10, the OIG also released a report on a facility in South Houston which experienced a similar fiasco during the peak holiday season last winter.

The Richmond facility was the first of its kind to reopen as part of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy's "Delivering for America" restructuring plan. This misnamed program will close more than 1,000 local post offices, shed tens of thousands of postal jobs and pave the way for the post office's eventual privatization. Opened in July 2023, Richmond is the first of 60 RPDCs which will consolidate regional Processing and Delivery Centers (PDC), Sorting and Delivery Centers (S&DC), and Local Processing Centers (LPC) into massive hubs that will serve as the "backbone" of the Postal Service's revamped network.

The IOG's reports are exercises in damage control. The Richmond report begins with an introduction hailing Delivering for America (DFA) as aimed at "creating a best-in-class mail and package processing network." It adds that RPDCs such as Richmond are the backbone of a new "modernized network" under the program.

"While the Postal Service had successes when implementing its first RP&DC, it also faced many challenges and identified many lessons learned," it continues.

The report depicts staggering levels of negligence and incompetence in the planning and implementation of this new

flagship facility. Detailed among its findings was that transportation routes to and from the RPDC were not even in place when the facility went online. In fact, routes were still not confirmed well into the holiday peak season five months later.

Extra trips skyrocketed by 700 percent as the facility scrambled to overcome misaligned scheduling between post office operations and transportation. The new High Output Package Sorters (HOPS) installed to automate package handling stood idle because no one knew how to operate the new machines, confirming statements made by workers at the facility to the *World Socialist Web Site* last year.

The result was that, even though working hours and overtime increased when Richmond reopened as an RPDC, the actual volume of mail declined when compared to previous metrics. The OIG cited management incompetence in its earlier reports in 2021.

The OIG also found that local managers did not have sufficient training to understand their roles and responsibilities. "As a result, we were unable to determine if the challenges are unique to the Richmond RP&DC conversion," the report claimed, "or tied to preexisting conditions."

In fact, the disaster in Richmond has been repeated again and again across the country. The OIG's report on the South Houston Local Processing Center found this single facility was responsible for delaying a whopping 384,000 pieces of mail. These delays were caused by diverting mail from the facility in North Houston, which is being redesigned as an RPDC. "[B]ut South Houston was not equipped to process the facility's volume, the report concluded.

Similar delays took place in Atlanta, Georgia when a new RPDC opened there in February.

The findings in the OIG's report completely expose the claims that DFA has anything to do with improving service, cutting costs and modernizing infrastructure. Its true mission is to strip down service at USPS, eventually selling off whatever is left to private buyers.

While the Richmond RPDC has been associated with months of mail delays, it has also been used to implement "optimized collections," with delivery units reassigned from local post

offices within a 30-minute radius to the larger Richmond facility. Pickup and delivery to offices outside of that radius have shifted to a “milk-run” style, with one trip handling both inbound and outbound mail made each morning. This means that mail from the afternoon will be left to sit around until pickup the following day.

In other words, the chaos in the Richmond RPDC was not “intermittent service impacts” caused by kinks in the new system, but its intended purpose. In remarks before the USPS Board of Governors, Postmaster General DeJoy let slip that only just “over 50 percent of Americans receive their mail and packages early,” implying much of the rest have been impacted by service disruptions.

Similar “kinks” have occurred on a massive scale with new tracking systems for letter carriers. The new Rural Route Evaluation Compensation System (RRECS) has resulted in massive wage cuts, often over \$10,000 or even \$20,000 in annual pay, for two-thirds of all rural carriers. The new TIAREAP surveillance system for city letter carriers has led to workers being written up by computers for unauthorized “stationary events” while on their routes. One such write-up likely contributed to the heat-related death of veteran carrier Eugene Gates last year in Dallas, Texas.

The trade union bureaucracy is playing a critical role in enabling these new measures aimed at driving workers out of the Post Office en masse. Both RRECS and TIAREAP have been extended by separate memoranda of understanding by the rural and city carriers’ unions, and the American Postal Workers Union, which covers many inside postal workers, has restricted action against the restructuring to a handful of toothless protests.

The National Association of Letter Carriers is even openly lying to defend DFA, claiming to its members that it will not result in job losses.

The highly public fiascos in Richmond, Houston and Atlanta serve the added purposes of providing a pretext for the eventual privatization of the USPS by creating highly public images of bureaucratic incompetence. No doubt they will be used as a convenient pretext in the near future by right-wing politicians in both parties to argue that the federal government should cut their losses with USPS and hand its operations to a private entity that “knows what it’s doing.”

DeJoy, who owns a major stake in companies holding contracts with USPS such as Amazon and UPS, has a major conflict of interest. USPS is increasingly serving as Amazon’s “last mile” vendor to the detriment of traditional mail delivery. As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, rural mail carriers have been instructed to prioritize Amazon package deliveries delaying regular mail delivery by days.

At the beginning of April, UPS was awarded the contract to become the USPS primary air cargo provider. This comes after UPS’s announcement that it will close 200 facilities in a consolidation project that will automate most package handling

at the cost of tens of thousands of jobs.

These changes come as USPS is expanding its package delivery business via its Ground Advantage service, a direct competitor with UPS Ground, which has seen its volumes drop in recent years..

Regardless of DeJoy’s personal conflicts of interest, the privatization of the post office has been a goal of both corporate parties for decades. Around the world, many post offices have already been privatized, such as Royal Mail in Britain and Deutsche Post in Germany.

Despite occasional feigned outrage from Democratic lawmakers, such as Tim Kaine of Virginia and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota over the disruption of mail and their “demanding” answers from the Postmaster General, both parties approved the Postal Reform Act of 2022, which will deprive USPS workers of almost \$200 billion in retirement health care funding. Both Kaine and Klobuchar voted in favor of the reform.

The evidence in the OIG’s report are only further proof that the fight to preserve the Post Office as a public service and saving tens of thousands of jobs requires the mobilization of the working class against the conspiracy of the financial oligarchs seeking its privatization.

Only the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee has raised the warning that this is a political fight against both corporate-controlled parties over the allocation of society’s resources. In a statement last October, the PWR&FC declared:

“Our terrible conditions do not result from the Post Office’s debt and even less by managerial “incompetence” or “glitches” in new evaluation systems. They are the intended product of a vast restructuring program called ‘Delivering for America,’ whose aim is to dismantle the post office and prepare the way for its eventual privatization.”

Postal workers must lead the working class in this struggle by organizing rank-and-file committees in every workplace, unifying them across the US, across rural and city carriers, and across vehicle operators, technicians, clerks, mail handlers and all crafts.



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