

USPS worker exposes chaos under “Delivering for America” restructuring

Our reporters

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Postal workers: Speak out against the NALC contract by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The World Socialist Web Site spoke recently with a United States Postal Service (USPS) letter carrier about the effects of the consolidation of a former facility into a new Sorting and Delivery Center (S&DC). The consolidation of offices into larger S&DCs has accelerated under the Delivering for America (DFA) initiative, now in its fourth year, which is aimed at consolidating operations into large Amazon-style automated facilities, wiping out tens of thousands of jobs.

The attack on the post office is set to massively ramp up under Trump and Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). The Trump White House intends to privatize the USPS entirely, as part of its broader drive to destroy federal agencies not directly related to war and repression.

The response of the union bureaucracy to DFA and to Trump has been open collaboration. The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) responded to a historic rejection of a poverty contract by having virtually the same deal imposed by arbitration. The bureaucrats, who have also backed DFA from the beginning, are responding to DOGE and Trump by offering to help find places to cut costs.

The worker told the WSWS:

This contract is no different than the same one over 70 percent of us voted no to. ... It’s an insult, and no way that was arbitrated. It was agreed upon before they even sat down to “discuss.” Everyone’s livid. We waited two years for scraps.

Saving the USPS means a rebellion from below against both Trump and his enablers in the bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is fighting to build such a movement. The Committee declared in a recent statement:

Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. ... This requires new organizations, rank-and-file committees, to mobilize ourselves independently of Trump’s collaborators in the Democrats and the union tops. We must safeguard our own initiative and begin organizing now rather than waiting for “permission” from the top which will never come.

Chaos in USPS facilities

According to the Save the Post Office website, as of last year, more than

3,300 postal delivery routes from 200 spoke offices had been consolidated into 60 S&DCs, a process which appears to be accelerating.

Spoke offices are spaces for employees to work without regularly travelling to the headquarters. Depending on the company’s needs, these can be shared coworking spaces or dedicated private offices.

In September of last year, the USPS inspector general issued a report which found that DFA has led to a dramatic decline in the quality of operations. The purpose of the program is not to make USPS “efficient” but to create chaos in order to justify privatizing it.

The letter carrier, whose name has been withheld to protect his or her identity, explained some of this.

WSWS: *What kinds of changes were introduced with Deliver for America?*

LC: Now a new machine has been added, the SDUS, which increases the speed but has lowered the efficiency. Packages not only are more likely to end up in the wrong gurney, but they also sort big [within weight and dimension limits of the machine] and small packages together.

Carriers must dig through big packages to find the small ones, which is tedious and obnoxious and also a time-wasting practice, and also it is more likely to result in fragile packages being smashed or damaged by much bigger ones. Those with unreadable barcodes get pushed to the end of the machine to be sorted by hand, which means they get delayed.

All the while, big and heavy packages beyond the size restrictions of the machine still must be hand-sorted by clerks in the end anyway. ... Their workload decreased in this way, BUT [they have left us] with less clerks to do the work. Clerks were short staffed and overworked because they still have several other jobs that they are responsible for performing, not just sorting packages. This was bad for carriers, clerks and customers.

The OIG (Office of Inspector General) audits showed that management is a big problem in S&DCs [Sorting and Development Centers] because they operate so differently than other types of facilities. They suggested there be specialized training meant specifically for S&DC operations.

But our management team has no idea what’s going on, which leaves the employees to manage themselves. And pretty much every day the rules would change. One day we would be instructed to do something one way, the next day that would change, then change back, then change to a different way, and back and forth for months.

WSWS: *What have been some of the impacts of job cuts on deliveries?*

LC: Every morning, there was a clerk who pushed a cart around full of keys, gas cards assigned to individual [delivery] vehicles, certified documents and parcels, express mail and parcels, and anything that required postage due. The clerk would hand each carrier their route’s accountable items; the carrier would sign their name stating they received the items; and at the end of the day, when returning the keys, gas cards, receipts, collected postage, a clerk would put it in its appropriate spot, and they would sign that it was returned.

With the S&DC, this position was completely removed. A clerk is still responsible in the morning, but in the evening, it is expected that a

manager will collect your accountables and clear you. They do not, and even if they do, they don't have any idea what is supposed to be assigned to which route so they can't even truly clear you.

This results in missing keys, missing gas cards, items being placed in the wrong spot, keys being taken home or left overnight in vehicles or in individual routes' cases. How can they be called "accountable items" if no one is being held accountable for them?

This has turned into carriers putting their accountables away themselves, which in the past was considered bad. You would get reprimanded for it. This is also considered crossing crafts, so it's also a violation of the contract.

This is just an example, but there are many smaller tasks that previously were performed by clerks throughout the day that are now expected of carriers. Collectively they add up, resulting in a heavier work load for both city and rural carriers.

WSWS: What was the consolidation to the new S&DC like?

LC: The entire construction process was a mess, more than nine months of constant construction workers roaming the building. For periods of time, we were without bathrooms, without water fountains, without a break room, parts of the parking lot were inaccessible at times, dust and materials were falling on employees.

All of this time spent to renovate from top to bottom, and yet so many poor decisions! Before construction, we had locked and secured doors to access the work floor. Those doors were removed and replaced by swinging doors. The doors are supposed to be chained when the last carrier leaves in the morning and unchained in the evening when the first carrier returns. This is not the case, leaving the work room floor open to anyone who decides to walk right inside.

Multiple times during the construction process, people did just that, because the main parking lot for customers was blocked off for some time, and customers didn't know where to park and which door to enter through. Several times employees were left to guide a customer back out and to the correct side of the building. This is problematic because anyone at any time could have entered with intent to harm—and they still could. A manager's desk is directly in front of one of the doors, but they are often roaming the floor and away from the desk, putting the employees at risk at any moment to the wrong person with bad intentions.

The expansion of the parking lot to accommodate more carriers has presented new problems. Most offices have enough space that there is some sheltered loading area, whether it is a building overhang, a dock for carriers to back up to where they can load or unload, and so on. When the number of carriers doubles, triples, or even more, this is no longer functional. Many carriers now load in the parking lot, in open elements.

When there is ice and snow, carriers must now spend a large portion of their time clearing their vehicles, which wasn't something that needed to be done prior. This also means that when it's raining, we are standing outside in the open rain trying to shove packages and mail into our trucks as fast as possible to protect them and keep them from getting soaked.

We start our routes with all of our mail, packages, and clothes dripping wet before we've even made our first delivery. I don't care about working in the snow, ice, rain, that's a part of the job. But it's such a shame for everything to get destroyed by torrential rains because we couldn't have a space to keep it dry while trying to sort everything into our trucks. When we carry mail while walking, we can keep it dry in our bags. But yet we don't have that option while pushing full trays into the trucks.

All the while, carriers are being told that they have time limits to be out of the building and to finish loading within a certain time limit. This is correct to an extent, but there is a formula and time limit per letter and parcel, and it's not one size fits all. Every route has a different volume and a different amount of delivery points, and every day is different. An office recently won a grievance against this. Yet in many offices nation

wide, it's a daily occurrence for carriers to hear "office times need improvement" regardless of that day's volume.

Staffing was not addressed prior to changes. Every town involved had their own employees, vehicles, systems, routes. Now all the towns that came into the SDC have to learn to adjust, not only to all of the changes and a new environment, but the time changes that have been implemented and all of the work inside of the office apart from delivering the route.

This also impacts drive time. Although the amount of coverage for delivery is the same, half the office now must drive much farther to and from the office, while the main hub office now has double the amount of mail and packages that it had previously to sort and deliver every day. A common recurring issue among every S&DC audit is "not enough staffing," and yet the plans continue without addressing this issue.

WSWS: How would you respond to claims by USPS that the S&DCs have increased delivery speed?

LC: The operations may have increased speed but lowered efficiency with more mistakes. And the failure to address staffing issues prior to the changes resulted in not enough carriers for the routes, meaning some routes are brought back unfinished almost every day.

When we don't have time to deliver full routes, we are instructed by management to deliver only packages, since they have barcodes and can be tracked. This means that USPS knowingly delays mail on a regular basis. Delaying first class mail is a fireable offense, and yet it's a regular occurrence in my office. It sounds like it is in other S&DCs as well. You can find videos, reports, etc. of even state governors speaking to the public addressing the changes and complaining about the delays and trying to figure out why and how to fix it.

WSWS: How has management reacted?

LC: Of course there is a contract and rules we are meant to follow. But many offices will overlook more minor and inoffensive rules, such as an incomplete uniform (such as a Non-Postal hat, or non-postal clothing during the cold seasons when carriers are bundling up to keep warm, and so on)

Following the conversion, management roams around and nitpicks every minor detail. They tell you that you need to be in uniform and so forth. I would argue it's bordering on harassment and doesn't affect an employee's ability to do their job correctly and efficiently. They also frequently comment on uniforms and shoes to the CCAs [City Carrier Assistants, a lower-tier, non-career track position], PTFs [Part-Time Flexible], and newer regulars who are still waiting on yearly uniform allowances, and can't afford to purchase the uniforms out of their own pockets. And they shouldn't have to, anyway.

It's other small things. In the past, carriers frequently decorated their cases with family photos, small trinkets, calendars, cards from customers. Now they are cracking down on this. I heard a carrier get into an argument with management about setting up photos of his family, reminders of why he spends so much time in a job that treats him so poorly. They've told him he's not even allowed to look at or see pictures of his family while he's working.

WSWS: What are your thoughts on DFA in general?

LC: The 10-year plan for "delivering for America" was actually a ploy all along to shift to a parcel delivery-focused service, reduce employees, increase profit and restrict access to rural customers.

One major concern with privatization primarily is that 51 million rural Americans will face restricted, if not total loss of, access to delivery. All of these changes were made without informing ANY of the local customers that they would be made in our area, which has resulted in a lot of local backlash and public hatred of the postal service.

The only way to fix it is to fight back against privatization and to let the rank and file of the USPS make the decisions that they see are best for the communities, without the interference or involvement of the government. But we won't have that opportunity to change things if we are obliterated.



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