

With union's approval, Irvington, New Jersey letter carriers work in filthy, hazardous post office

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Workers for the US Postal Service (USPS) have been ordered to return to a previously flooded and filthy building in Irvington, New Jersey. Pictures of the building reviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site* show floors streaked with black grime, rusted metal, shaky lighting fixtures and a large puddle. The building smells like sewage, according to a worker who spoke under condition of anonymity. The building has been condemned, he added.

The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) approved management's decision to make its members work in these flagrantly unsanitary and dangerous conditions. The union neither consulted with the Irvington postal workers beforehand nor provided them with any protective equipment. NALC's actions reveal the bureaucracy's open hostility to its own members and its complicity with management.

Irvington is a mid-sized city that borders Newark, the largest city in New Jersey. After the 1967 riots, many Newark residents moved to Irvington, and the latter became a predominantly African American city. A high proportion of Irvington residents (36.5 percent) was born abroad, mainly in Latin America, according to Census data. Per capita and household income are lower in Irvington than in the US overall, and the city's poverty rate is 18.1 percent.

The Irvington Post Office has flooded many times in recent years. After each flood, USPS has refused to fix the flood-related damage or make the building safer, according to the postal worker. The most recent flood, which occurred in August 2024, left the building in shambles, and postal workers were relocated to a post office in downtown Newark.

In late July, postal workers were told to return to the

Irvington Post Office, which has not been repaired, according to the worker. The building now has mold and exposed asbestos. Sewage has made its way into the walls, the tiles, the lockers, the refrigerator, the water fountain, the sinks and electrical wires, said one worker. "Our work conditions are inhumane just so they can save a dollar."

Two workers have asked USPS management repeatedly to provide documentation indicating that the building is safe to work in. They have not received any such documentation, which most likely does not exist.

Along with his colleagues, the postal worker who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* works in this decrepit building for three to four hours per day before delivering mail. Exposure to these conditions carries many health risks. Mold can contribute to respiratory problems, especially for vulnerable populations. Exposure to contaminated water also can cause skin or respiratory infections. Contaminated water from the water fountain could cause gastrointestinal illness. Exposure to asbestos can cause lung cancer or mesothelioma. It is possible that the building also contains electrical hazards.

NALC's acceptance of these scandalous working conditions is consistent with its demonstrated disregard for workers' lives. Every summer, postal workers die after being exposed to extreme heat. The preventable deaths of letter carriers such as Jacob Taylor, Dan Workman and Eugene Gates elicit no more than perfunctory statements from NALC President Brian Renfroe and other officials. Meanwhile, more than 140,000 USPS vehicles lack air conditioning, and plans to replace them with newer vehicles have been postponed repeatedly.

Rather than ensuring the safety of its members, NALC bureaucrats defend the economic interests of USPS management. In January, the union brought a concession-laden tentative agreement to its members, who rejected it by 70 percent in an election marked by high turnout. When a virtually identical agreement was imposed on letter carriers through binding arbitration, Renfroe hailed this anti-democratic action as a victory. The agreement provides annual “raises” of 1.3 percent, 1.4 percent and 1.5 percent, which are cuts to real pay when inflation is considered.

Moreover, Renfroe has publicly supported the Delivering for America plan to restructure USPS. This pro-corporate reorganization will entail the destruction of jobs, the closure of postal facilities and the ultimate privatization of USPS. The aim of Delivering for America is to transform USPS from an agency that guarantees universal postal delivery into a private enterprise that generates profits for shareholders and provides customers with no guarantees.

These attacks on postal workers coincide with attacks on federal workers more broadly. At least 128,709 federal workers had been laid off or targeted for layoffs as of June 26, according to CNN. President Donald Trump has also limited the number of new federal hires, relative to departures, while ending collective bargaining for 370,000 federal workers and slashing budgets for agencies such as the Department of Labor and the Department of Education.

The postal worker who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* contacted a safety engineer at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to demand an inspection of the Irvington Post Office. More than two weeks later, the official has not responded. OSHA, which is part of the Department of Labor, is another target of Trump’s attacks. It will face an 8 percent budget cut, lose more than 12 percent of its staff and conduct nearly 10,000 fewer inspections in the next fiscal year.

This historic onslaught against federal workers is part of an offensive aimed at clawing back the gains that the entire working class has made over the past several decades. Social spending and regulatory enforcement are being slashed to free money for tax cuts for the wealthy and for increased military spending. The ruling class intends to make workers pay for the genocide of the Palestinians, the ongoing NATO war against Russia

and ultimately a war against China, which is the main economic and geopolitical rival of the US.

The Irvington postal workers’ fight for sanitary working conditions must be part of a broader struggle to defend the social rights and living standards of the working class. By its repeated betrayals, NALC has proven itself an enemy of letter carriers and an accomplice of management and the state. The other postal unions play a similar role. The urgent task is to expand the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by organizing workers independently of the union bureaucracy at every postal facility. These rank-and-file committees must bring power back to the shop floor and develop a strategy not only to attain postal workers’ objective needs, but also to end capitalist exploitation.



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