

For a rank-and-file inquiry into the deaths of USPS workers Nick Acker and Russell Scruggs, Jr.!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
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The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls for an independent inquiry—led by rank-and-file workers—into the deaths of Nick Acker and Russell Scruggs, Jr. at two separate US postal facilities in the past two weeks. We urge postal workers with relevant information to come forward with testimony. This is necessary to expose the brutal conditions facing postal workers, which are part of the industrial slaughterhouse that has become daily life for workers across the United States and the world.

On November 8, at the Detroit Network Distribution Center in Allen Park, Michigan, Nick Acker was killed by a mail sorting machine that he was performing maintenance on. His body was not recovered for eight hours, and then only after his wife came to pick him up. Workers report that a grievance had been filed on the machine, whose safety features were allegedly disabled in order to keep operations moving.

On Saturday, November 15, Russell Scruggs, Jr. died after falling and hitting his head at the Palmetto Processing & Distribution Center in Georgia. Workers say the lack of cell phone service in the facility and the lack of emergency protocols inside the plant contributed to his death because of a lengthy delay in providing him with medical attention.

In both cases, management kept operations running, according to reports from workers in the facilities.

These preventable tragedies have lifted the veil on the brutal conditions at USPS. Allen Park workers say the facility is a “death trap.” Palmetto workers pointed to the death of 59-year-old Eric Smith in June, as well as two recent suicides off-site. Last year, 48-year-old Shannon Barnes also died at the facility.

These deaths are only some of the latest in an unending series of workplace disasters in the United States. The UPS cargo plane crash on November 4 in Louisville, Kentucky, killed 14 people. A recent catastrophic explosion at a Tennessee munitions plant killed 16. An ammonia leak on

November 14 in Oklahoma sent 34 to the hospital. An explosion at the Clairton steel mill near Pittsburgh in August killed two and injured 10.

There have been at least five deaths among postal workers this year. This includes two letter carriers, Dan Workman of Grand Junction, Colorado, and Jacob Taylor of Dallas, Texas, in apparent heat-related incidents.

The IWA-RFC has already launched an inquiry into the death of autoworker Ronald Adams Sr., who worked at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant in Southeast Michigan. Adams was crushed to death while performing maintenance in circumstances apparently similar to those that killed Acker. A meeting with initial findings was held on July 27. At the meeting, it was reported that the bypassing of lockout-tagout procedures by management, an elementary safety measure, likely played a significant role.

Also in June, the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which is part of the IWA-RFC, issued a call for an investigation into the deaths of Workman and Taylor.

The work of the IWA-RFC on this issue must be expanded. This is not a journalistic exercise but an effort to arm workers with the knowledge they need to defend themselves and go on the offensive against the regime of corporate dictatorship in the workplaces, which makes these deaths inevitable.

The slaughterhouse is covered up by the corporate media. It is also covered up by the trade union bureaucracy, which has done nothing to protect workers and functions as an arm of management. The American Postal Workers Union has remained silent on this month’s deaths. Workers report that it is complicit in Acker’s death because of the outstanding grievance, filed only a few weeks prior.

This situation is the universal experience of the working class. At UPS, the Teamsters are helping carry out tens of thousands of job cuts. In the auto industry, the United Auto Workers has done nothing about Adams’ death, while not lifting a finger as thousands are laid off.

This is why the investigation must be taken up by workers themselves in a rank-and-file inquiry. No amount of pressure will compel the bureaucracy to do anything, because they are part of the problem.

A critical issue is the role played by relentless cost-cutting. The USPS is in the midst of the “Delivering for America” (DFA) restructuring program, begun under Trump’s first term and continued under Biden, aimed at making the post office profitable along Amazon-style lines and preparing the ground for its eventual privatization. It involves closing 1,000 local offices, consolidating tens of thousands of routes and concentrating operations into a smaller number of large, automated facilities requiring far fewer workers.

Invasive new monitoring systems for city carriers are being used to automatically write workers up for “stationary events.” This contributed to the death of Dallas carrier Eugene Gates in 2023. Among rural carriers, workers have long been forced to labor on a kind of piece-rate system. Re-evaluation of the “value” of their routes slashed pay for two-thirds, often by \$10,000 and even \$20,000 per year.

The DFA program is supported by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) and National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association (NRLCA) unions, which also signed side agreements to implement pay cuts and monitoring over the opposition of workers.

DFA’s implementation has been chaotic, with medical test results and other key mail reported delayed for weeks. According to one Palmetto worker, management cleans up the facility when media or Congresspeople show up in response to public outcry, only for things to go back to “normal” afterward.

Post offices are under attack in every country. Massive cuts are underway at Canada Post. Royal Mail has been acquired by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky. Deutsche Post was privatized years ago, and Brazilian postal workers are facing around 10,000 layoffs as part of a privatization plan.

The same conditions are mirrored across every industry. US companies have cut 1.1 million jobs this year, the highest number since the Great Recession. Corporations are salivating over the use of AI and other technologies to wipe out tens of millions of jobs. There is a fundamental contradiction in the use of these advanced labor-saving technologies, which could be used to address the cost-of-living crisis and make the workplace safer but instead are being used to turn back the clock on working conditions to the 19th century.

This process is enabled by the complete integration of the corporate oligarchy and the government. David Steiner, the new Postmaster General, is a board member of FedEx. David Keeling, the new head of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), is a former “safety” chief at

UPS and Amazon, both notorious low-wage sweatshops. The ruling class is shutting down safety agencies, cutting off food stamps and Medicaid to tens of millions, and destroying anything which even remotely protects workers from injury and destitution.

The history of the post office shows that resistance depends on the initiative of the rank and file. The 1970 national postal strike was a wildcat strike in defiance of the postal union bureaucrats against earlier attacks by Nixon.

The spirit of resistance must find new outlets. New organizations—rank-and-file committees—must be built, combining democratic control and organization with a rebellion against the union apparatus. This must be based on a strategy of uniting the working class all over the world to fight for what workers urgently need, not what management is willing to give.

On Sunday, the IWA-RFC held a meeting on mass layoffs, addressed by workers across industries. In the opening report, WSWs writer Tom Hall explained that the layoffs were part of a “war on the working class.” On Monday, the IWA-RFC issued a statement explaining that “The solution of the working class must be the development of a network of rank-and-file committees in every industry and workplace, to bring the force of the working class to bear against the entrenched power of the oligarchy.”

The time has come to take a stand. An independent investigation into the deaths of Nick Acker, Russell Scruggs, Jr. and other postal workers will become a spearhead for the fight to empower rank-and-file committees to take control of safety conditions, guarantee the right to life, health and safety on the job, and end the dictatorship of production for profit.

Join the inquiry by filling out the form below.



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