

Peak season disaster at Alabama USPS facility shows need for rank-and-file control of staffing

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
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Once again United States Postal Service (USPS) workers across the country are being overwhelmed during the peak holiday season. This is the direct product of years of cuts and the so-called “modernization” drive aimed at making the Post Office “profitable” by reducing the workforce and shrinking the physical footprint of postal operations.

These conditions will not only continue but worsen until we organize independently to reverse job losses and fight for adequate hiring so that we can do our jobs safely and properly.

Photographs and videos circulating online show distribution facilities so overwhelmed with packages that stacks are spilling into walkways. A local news report from Louisville, Kentucky showed bins crowded into walkways, while customers complained of lengthy delays in receiving their mail.

The worst conditions, however, appear to be at the Postal Distribution Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Photographs shared with the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by workers show interior aisles totally blocked by packages. Several photos show piles obstructing fire exits, creating a serious and unacceptable safety hazard.

This is a disaster waiting to happen. In 1911, nearly 150 workers died in the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire because management locked the doors to the building. How many people would die if a fire broke out in this facility, only to find the emergency exits blocked?

Workers at the Huntsville facility told the Rank-and-File Committee that they are being forced into mandatory overtime, working up to 14 hours a day. They report that grievances have been filed repeatedly, but the union has done nothing. Some workers have

tried to call the American Postal Workers Union’s main office, only to find that the new president has not returned their calls.

Management is surging workers from other facilities to help clear the backlog. According to one worker familiar with the area, USPS is offering to pay for hotels and provide a per diem for anyone willing to travel. But workers report that conditions in many of the other facilities are hardly any better.

Workers say conditions are extremely dangerous. One worker told the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee that 25 injuries have occurred at the Huntsville facility since December 1. We have not been able to independently verify this figure. However, even outside of peak season, these facilities are unsafe.

The Rank-and-File Committee has launched an investigation into conditions after the deaths last month of two co-workers, Nick Acker in Allen Park, Michigan, and Russell Scruggs Jr. in Palmetto, Georgia. Acker died after falling into a mail-sorting machine during maintenance, and his body was not found for eight hours. Scruggs died after falling and hitting his head. Palmetto workers point to a lack of basic safety training and the apparent blocking of cell phone signals by management, which delayed emergency care.

The delays now occurring at these facilities are only the tip of the iceberg. They have become commonplace over the last several years, following the introduction of the “Delivering for America” scheme under former Postmaster General Louis DeJoy. Two years ago, the Rank-and-File Committee warned that the program “seeks to transform the USPS from a public service, which used to pay decent wages and pensions, into an

entity beholden to shareholder profits, with a super-exploited, Amazon-style workforce.”

This misnamed program has led to massive, weeks-long delays across the country. Prominent examples include the Richmond, Virginia S&DC during the 2023 holiday season, where time-sensitive cancer screening results and other critical mail were delayed for weeks. In the Houston area, during the same period, delays lasted for months, with officials cynically blaming absenteeism, the weather and “equipment failure.”

Workers report that facilities are being overwhelmed by Amazon packages in particular, with the Post Office functioning as a virtual last-mile delivery contractor in large parts of the country. Workers say management routinely prioritizes the delivery of Amazon packages over other forms of mail, in violation of the USPS’s legally mandated Universal Service Obligation.

As soon as the Palmetto Regional Processing and Distribution Center opened in early 2024, it was instantly hit by delays, as trucks were seen lined up for hours. This was the first major new facility opened under the “Delivering for America” program and was touted as the future of the Post Office. That said more than management intended. Including Russell Scruggs, the facility has seen three workplace deaths in the past year and a half. Workers also report two suicides.

The new Postmaster General, David Steiner, is a former board member of FedEx. Whether or not he still plans to sell off some or all of the USPS, Steiner has continued to subordinate public service to the profit motive. He has boasted that the US Postal Service eliminated 12 million work hours this year and aims to eliminate another 12 million next year. During the peak season, USPS hired only 14,000 seasonal workers, far below historical norms.

In other words, fewer and fewer workers are being forced to do more and more work. The result will not only be more lost and delayed mail, but more injuries and more deaths.

Union officials have refused to do anything to defend postal workers. APWU President Jonathan Smith recently posted a “season’s greetings” video that might as well have come from management or HR. He did not mention a single issue workers are facing and instead patronizingly told us that we are “important.”

The union apparatus refuses to carry out even the most limited form of representation. Worse, it actively

collaborates with management against workers who speak out. This was shown in a recent and horrific experience reported by the WSWs, in which an Illinois postal worker was sexually harassed, threatened with violence and ultimately fired.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee reiterates our demand for adequate staffing. To serve the public, postal workers must be able to do our jobs safely and without exhausting and dangerous overwork.

We demand workers’ control over staffing levels, as well as control over safety and working conditions and enforceable measures to prevent harassment and abuse.

These demands can be enforced in the same way workers have always won gains: through mass, coordinated action. They will never be taken up by the union bureaucrats and can only be fought for by workers ourselves.

This is why we have formed the Postal Worker Rank-and-File Committee. We call on postal workers to found local committees at post offices and distribution centers across the country, made up of trusted rank-and-file workers and excluding management stool pigeons. The committee will help establish lines of communication and develop a common strategy.

Our lives are more important than their profits. Join the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee today to begin fighting back.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact