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The Drive to Privatize One of the Country's Greatest Achievements

Save the Postal Service Before It's Too Late!

by ANDY PIASCIK

Perhaps you've noticed there are fewer post offices around. In the past decade, the United States Postal Service has closed almost 200 facilities nationwide in an aggressive effort to do away with and eventually privatize an institution that is older than the country itself. Included in that number are post offices that used to be on Main Street near St. Vincent's Hospital and on Stratford Avenue. Like so many, they were closed and not replaced. Those closings have left Bridgeport, a city of 150,000 people, with exactly four post offices.

For the rest of 2015, 82 more facilities nationwide are on the chopping block and, barring community outrage, won't be replaced. The rationale used by those leading the attack is that the USPS is losing money. In fact, it's a huge money maker, with operating profits in 2014 of \$1.4 billion. What has caused its financial problems is the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA), an unprecedented law pushed through by politicians who serve the 1% requiring pre-funding of health benefits for USPS retirees for 75 years.

The yearly tab for that monstrosity is \$5.5 billion and the intent was precisely what is happening: the gutting of one of the country's most valued resources. No other agency is required to do anything remotely like pre-fund health benefits for 75 years. That the PAEA was rammed through by politicians who serve business elites should surprise no one. Their agenda, be they Republican or Democrat, is to destroy projects that serve the common good, especially hugely successful ones like the postal service. Further exposing their agenda is the profligate pre-funding requirement

Throughout the country, postal workers and community allies have prevented the closing of many facilities. Among the actions taken were a post office occupation in

Oregon and the erection of a tent city in front of a facility in California. Several years ago, similar popular pressure stopped the attempted elimination of Saturday delivery service.

The large scale elimination of facilities has had the predictable result of increasing costs because of the greater distance mail must travel. Consider that an item mailed from a Bridgeport address to another Bridgeport address, for example, now goes to a distribution facility in Kearny, New Jersey before arriving at its final destination, then consider that the same rocket scientists who came up with that one hail themselves as fiscally responsible and attack the USPS as inefficient. Fewer facilities also results in skyrocketing overtime for letter carriers unable to complete their routes in eight hours and longer commutes for workers who can be transferred as much as 50 miles with no appeal or recourse.

Over one hundred thousand good paying USPS jobs have been killed as a result of the privatization efforts, and virtually all new hires are temps whose benefits and wages are far lower than regular workers. The privatizers have also shifted much postal work to Staples, a company notorious for its hostility to employees.

Staples, for example, cut the hours of thousands of workers below 25 hours per week to make them ineligible for company health insurance, and Staples employees also earn far less than established postal workers. In response, there have been many actions around the country demanding that the Staples contract be rescinded. Instead, the USPS intends to also begin shifting work to Walmart, an employer with a record even worse than Staples.

One more ugly part of the story is the incestuous relationship between the USPS, privatizers and the corporate politicians. The contract to close post offices was awarded to the CBRE real estate firm whose CEO Robert Sulentic is on the Staples board of directors. Richard Blum, CBRE board chair until late last year, is married to California Senator Dianne Feinstein. CBRE will make hundreds of millions from the deal.

Those who delude themselves that the heavily subsidized "private" sector can do a better job than the USPS should be careful what they wish for. UPS, FedEx and other private carriers are more expensive than the USPS and less efficient. And unlike the USPS, there are many parts of the country that private carriers do not service.

A publicly-funded, national postal service is one of our country's great achievements. It should be improved, not destroyed, and a collective demand for the repeal of the PAEA would be a big step in the right direction. The public should also join postal workers to demand an end to the contracts with Staples and Walmart and an end to postal facility closures.
