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NEW DAY AT USPS

NEWS FOR USPS WORKERS, BY USPS WORKERS!

ON THE PROPOSED VOTE-BY-MAIL RESTRICTIONS

Over the past few months there has been a series of court cases following Trump's March 31st executive order (EO) that sought to restrict voting-by-mail ahead of the November midterm elections. It's been a confusing circus of lawsuits, injunctions, politicians taking sides, and infighting within the US capitalist state's court system. It's no secret that Trump, himself, uses vote-by-mail, along with plenty of his allies and potential supporters. It's also no secret that Postmaster General Steiner and the Board Of Governors will readily do the bidding of the Trump administration when called upon (for example, they clearly only "oppose" the postal privatization agenda in words, not in actions).

The detail-lacking executive order entitled "Ensuring Citizenship Verification and Integrity in Federal Elections" would have required the Department of Homeland Security to create "State Citizenship Lists" derived from federal databases (e.g. the Social Security Administration), which would essentially be the list of citizens who could vote. USPS would have been directed to make a list of people who ballots would be sent to, and states would have been required to send their own list of mail-in and absentee ballot voters to USPS, or else lose their federal funding. This EO was signed in the wake of this country's latest war on working class immigrants, expanding government and workplace surveillance, and attempts to roll back democratic and meager economic gains for working and oppressed people living in the US.

Lawsuits and the Role of USPS

A group of mostly Democratic states/jurisdictions brought a lawsuit that challenged the legality of certain parts of the EO, which caused a court to rule that it could not apply to these states/jurisdictions for the time being. A separate case, headed by a group of non-governmental organizations (NGO's), was also brought to a federal court, which blocked USPS from implementing the order. The Trump administration requested that the Supreme Court lift these injunctions: in California v. USPS, the Supreme Court kept the block of the EO in place and basically ruled that if USPS has the authority to regulate mail-in ballots (the final legality has yet to be determined), there is simply not enough time to implement the changes for the midterm elections.

All of this means that the issue may be addressed again and pushed for by the Trump administration in the future, and USPS management has shown that it's ready to comply and make postal workers responsible for carrying out this mess. The company prepared an almost-100-page document that laid out the guidelines for implementing changes according to the order. Steiner testified that USPS "would tell the state(s) that we need the manifest [lists of mail-in and absentee ballot voters]", making it perfectly clear that they will play Trump's game. In short, the

guidelines would require each voter to be matched with a specific barcode, and USPS would become the gatekeeper for which ballots are considered valid. This would have also shifted local and state-level responsibilities to the federally-operated USPS, and postal workers like us would have to participate in a restrictive process that we have no interest in. For now, however, these guidelines cannot go into effect.

Craft Union Responses

The postal unions have nominally opposed Trump's attempt to impose new restrictions on mail-in voting, but their responses have remained firmly within the institutions of the state. The APWU has criticized USPS for attempting to make postal workers responsible for determining whether election mail meets new federal requirements, arguing that postal employees should not be turned into election administrators. NALC has likewise opposed the executive order and supported congressional efforts to overturn it. Both unions have relied heavily on lawsuits, lobbying, statements to politicians, and appeals to USPS management and the Board of Governors.

This response is entirely consistent with the craft unions' broader political strategy. Rather than building the independent power of postal workers, their leadership continually directs their efforts toward lobbying politicians, supporting legislation, and relying on the courts to defend our interests. The same politicians and institutions that preside over attacks on postal workers are presented as the means through which those attacks can be stopped.

Our Response

We should oppose Trump's executive order and any attempt to make postal workers responsible for restricting access to mail-in ballots. At the same time, we should understand that this fight is bigger than one executive order or one administration. The ruling class has repeatedly fought over how much political participation working people should be allowed. The Democrats and liberal NGO's oppose Trump's restrictions because they defend a political system in which elections remain an important mechanism for containing social discontent and directing it into electoral channels. Republicans support restrictions that can limit the participation of sections of the population they believe are less likely to support them. Neither approach gives working people meaningful control over the society we live in.

As mentioned before, the attack on mail-in voting is also taking place alongside the broader assault on immigrants, one of the most vulnerable and exploited sections of the working class. Restrictions on political participation do not exist separately from the material conditions imposed on workers through policing, deportations, low wages, and exploitation. Voting rights are rights workers have fought for, but we should recognize how limited those rights are under capitalism. We can cast a ballot for politicians every few years, while the institutions that determine our working conditions remain controlled by employers, bureaucrats, and the capitalist state.

The craft unions' responses show the limits of relying on those institutions. We do not currently have the organization necessary to challenge USPS management through collective action, but that is precisely the problem we need to solve. Our power does not ultimately come from lobbying politicians or asking the courts to protect us--it comes from our position as workers and our ability to collectively withhold our labor. Building that power at USPS is the task before us.

