

An interview with a part-time UPS worker

We all see “the union being paid out and working with the company”

Will Morrow
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United Parcel Service (UPS) workers are continuing to speak out against the sellout agreement released by the Teamsters union last week.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke yesterday with Roland, a warehouse worker in Texas. Roland has worked at UPS for 10 years. Although he works full-time hours, like more than two thirds of UPS’s 230,000 employees he is employed on a part-time contract. “I’ve tried to get a full-time warehouse position every time one becomes available, but I have never been able to get it because the first preference goes to the current full-time drivers,” he said.

Roland is a sorter, which involves sorting packages unloaded from a truck by an unloader onto a conveyer belt in the warehouse. He said that the contract published last week was “a huge misrepresentation for the Teamster members and a sellout,” which if approved would “create a second-class driver and continue to undermine part-timers.”

Roland had just read a WSWs article featuring interviews from UPS workers opposing the contract earlier that morning. “The article was good. I came across your website when a colleague messaged me with it on Facebook. Now I’ve seen another article of yours posted by another colleague of mine. We were speaking about the union being paid out and working with the company. We can all see that is taking place.”

Throughout the negotiations for the contract, workers “are not being informed about anything at our hubs,” he explained. “We go and ask the union stewards, and they say they have no idea. Everything is under the table. They haven’t even said when the vote is supposed to be.” The union officials “tell us to stay updated with [the union-controlled Facebook page] UPS Rising,” which “we all know is doing damage control.”

Part-time workers start out at UPS making as little as \$10 an hour. Roland works the midnight shift and is allowed just one 10-minute break. “The working conditions there are pretty bad,” he said. “The heat index reaches 95+ degrees [35 degrees Celsius], and since we’re in Texas, the humidity is usually 80-100 percent. Fans are just circulating more hot air. The water fountains are not maintained and are just filthy, and they force us to try to keep up with the work with their PPH [package per hour].”

If Roland wants to drink clean water during his shift, he has to take a 10-minute walk to the other side of the plant where there is filtered water. “Otherwise, if you drink the water you will feel sick. It tastes like metal,” he said. “UPS has been providing water coolers near us, but they give us a 20-pack of water bottles for 10 or more people. There have been [faintings and heat strokes], so UPS has given us coolers with ice and water in each workstation, but some nights they are just empty.”

Each year, there is growing pressure on workers due to speedups by the company, which are approved by the union. A year ago, for example, at Roland’s depot there was one sorter for every unloader. Last year, management implemented a new system by opening the sorting aisle and having 10 unloaders for every 8 sorters, forcing the sorters to sort packages at a much faster rate. “This causes a huge issue to safety for someone picking up someone else’s slack, and there are too many boxes,” Roland explained.

“It creates a huge mess on the sort aisle, where there is not a clear path to and from, and boxes are stacking on top of each other, which is a huge safety hazard.” Roland said that workers “complained to the union and the safety supervisor, and the union steward just told us to stop the line if it gets too crazy.”

Roland described the relationship of the union to the workers as they start out at the warehouse. “UPS has a high turnover rate. When a new person comes in, a union steward will chase them down to get them to sign up to pay dues. But once they’re signed up, you never see the union again. When I’ve had complaints I thought, ‘Who do I ask questions to?’ There is no one to turn to.”

With the release of the latest agreement, the union has boasted that part-time workers will now start out at \$13 per hour, and eventually be able to reach \$15.50. Roland noted sarcastically that this was a “great thing—it’s basically minimum wage.” He asked why the union was “advocating for minimum wage. I shouldn’t have to say: Why should I work for \$13? A lot of fast-food restaurants pay that, and there you are working with AC.”

While maintaining part-time workers as a permanent, poverty-wage workforce, the contract released by the union also creates a new tier of lower-paid “hybrid” drivers aimed at destroying the last remaining decent-paying job at the company. It also maintains the company’s ability to force workers to work for over 70 hours a week during peak season.

Roland said he is campaigning among other workers for a “no” vote on the contract. He believes that social media has enabled more and more workers to communicate with one another and learn about the real character of the agreement.

“Social media has taken over,” he said. “Less and less is being kept under the radar. More and more information is leaking out. Voices are being heard across the nation and around the world. Information gets spread really quickly. This contract should have no chance at all with workers on Facebook and reading your website as well.”

The SEP urges UPS workers to read and distribute our recent statement, “The way forward for UPS workers,” and to contact the World Socialist Web Site for assistance in organizing workplace committees.



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