

UPS workers describe company reign of terror in wake of Teamsters sellout

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19 December 2018

The WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter urges workers to subscribe for regular updates here.

It is more than two months since the Teamsters union illegitimately ratified a sellout five-year national labor contract covering a quarter of a million United Parcel Service (UPS) workers. The union utilized a loophole in its constitution to despotically override a 54 percent “no” vote by the membership.

One month later, the Teamsters forced through a separate contract on almost 12,000 subsidiary UPS Freight division workers, after making them vote again on virtually the same agreement they had already rejected. The Teamsters threatened the freight workers with a lockout and the loss of medical benefits if they continued to resist the company-backed deal and declared that they would instruct workers at the much larger parcel division to remain on the job if the freight workers went on strike.

The outcome of the union’s gangsterism is a series of far-reaching attacks that will permanently reduce the conditions and wages of current and future UPS workers. These include the creation of a new tier of lower-paid hybrid warehouse/drivers—a first step for extending the conditions of part-time work from the warehouse to the delivery drivers—and the maintenance of poverty-level wages for hundreds of thousands of warehouse employees who remain part-time employees.

As if this were not bad enough, the union’s actions have given the company a green light to press its offensive. Workers from multiple hubs who spoke to the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* this week report that in the past two months, management has carried out a wave of layoffs and firings of workers, cut workers’ hours, and closed or idled “unprofitable” hubs.

At a southern California hub, Irene, a porter who has worked at UPS for more than a decade, said the company is “firing people left and right for things like ‘stealing hours,’ which means they were having a conversation at

work.”

“In the last couple months, I know four people who’ve been fired, and that’s just those I know of,” she said. “Sometimes you go years before hearing about someone fired, and then it’s four in a row.” She said one worker with 22 years at the company was “terminated last week because they said he had stolen 400 hours of time from them over 22 years”—the equivalent of approximately 20 minutes per week, or 4 minutes per shift. “It’s ludicrous,” she said. “It took them 22 years to find that out?”

Another coworker was terminated “because they said they caught him sleeping on camera.” Irene said “the company has to have proof for that, but the Teamsters Business Agent didn’t even show up” to the review panel. “Whenever you call them about something, they say they’re away at panel—but then they’re never there when you need them.” The worker “was so intimidated he didn’t challenge it and left.”

Last Thursday, Irene and her coworkers arrived at work at 6:30am to a notice from management written on the dry eraser board: “Combo [combination] workers, no more than four hours, and part-timers, no more than 3.5.” This means Irene’s hours have been cut from almost full-time to 18 hours per week. “It’s crazy. I’ve never witnessed this before. They say they’re making cuts everywhere. Management just told us they might be laying us off after New Year’s. The company says the union is not going to fight for you, so you’ve got take it.”

Irene also said that warehouse workers are yet to see the \$13 an hour starting wage—itself below the poverty-line for a family—which the Teamsters proclaimed as a central “victory” in its sellout agreement. “We’re told we might see our retroactive pay increases in March. We asked the Teamsters Business Agent about it and he said we are selfish. Every day is like something new that’s bad.”

Peter is a part-time warehouse worker in Indianapolis. He earns \$10.35 an hour and works a midnight shift, often

for as few as three and a half hours. He earns so little he cannot afford a car, so when he is told to go home early, he has to wait in the break room for up to an hour until the 4:30am bus. He described the conditions of endless management harassment, which have been intensified since the contract.

“We have slave-like conditions,” he said. “Management bark and push and order the part-timers. They preach safety, but we’re pushed harder and faster.” He said that “if UPS could go back down to \$8.50 an hour, they’d do it. The supervisors are told by management that they should get eight hours of work from us in 3.5 hours [and] to get it done at all costs. They are supposed to send the full-timers home, while getting us part-timers ‘motivated.’ That means constantly yelling and screaming, ‘Go, go, go!’”

Lee, a UPS Freight driver in Illinois, said multiple workers have been laid off or not asked to come in to work since the contract was pushed through. Having been permitted by the Teamsters to empty all the freight from its system in the midst of the contract vote in November—an action aimed at intimidating workers with the threat of a lockout—management is now justifying layoffs with reference to a loss of business as a result of its own actions.

Another driver at Lee’s hub had been called in to work on only two days in the month since the contract was ratified. Lee noted that the driver “was one of those guys who filed grievances. I’m starting to think they are weeding out the ones they think are troublemakers.” He said he had seen “a lot of guys posting about closures and layoffs on Facebook. They said one of the hubs in North Carolina was now unprofitable. A lot of line-haul and dockworkers are being laid off.”

“I’ve been telling people that being a Teamster used to mean something, but it doesn’t anymore. The powers that run it are doing backroom deals, midnight handshakes with the very people they’re negotiating with and selling out the membership.”

Lee said he had seen the report by the WSWs on the December 9 public meeting in Detroit, organized by the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*, where autoworkers from the Midwest adopted a resolution calling for the formation of rank-and-file workplace committees, independent of the United Auto Workers, to organize a struggle against General Motors’ planned plant closures in the US and Canada.

“I think this is an excellent thing,” Lee said, adding that if workers have their own committees, “the guys on the

floor will have a voice that can be heard, and could address grievances on the shop floor.

“If you’re a janitor in a school, or the guy out there on the assembly line building Buicks, we all take pride in our job and want to go home at the end of the day,” he said. “We don’t want to be scared to death of not having a job at 5pm or if you’ll get paid or have benefits next week. Something like that, if it’s organized, will unite so many people on so many levels.

“I deliver grinding wheels that are used in auto assembly. We are connected. We have to come together and have a voice and unite us all: UPS, auto industry, schools, hospitals, all of us. It would send a clear message that we aren’t going to take what corporate America is selling anymore.

“And we should do it internationally,” he added. “The companies are saying we can’t afford it and we can go somewhere else. That way they’ll be met by the same voice, wherever they go, that they’re met with here.”

Irene said she was proud of the decision by autoworkers to establish a committee to fight back. “Everyone should get away from the damn union because it’s useless,” she said. “We all need to walk out together: not just UPS, but Amazon and auto too.”

“This isn’t just America, what’s happening in France [mass ‘Yellow Vest’ protests] is what we’re dealing with here,” she said. “The whole world is fighting. So, we have to fight. The corporations need to fall.

“More and more people are saying we need to break from the unions. They threaten to fire you if you stop paying union dues, and that’s how they hold onto you. But the people have to stand up.”

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