

UPS worker dies of heart attack; UPS Freight lays off part-timers over holidays

Workplace nightmare after Teamsters sellout

Will Morrow
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The WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter urges UPS workers to subscribe here for updates and information, and to send us reports for publication on the conditions in your hub. We will protect your anonymity.

There is widespread opposition and anger among a quarter of a million UPS and UPS Freight workers over brutal conditions enforced by management and the Teamsters in the wake of the union's imposition of sellout national contracts in October and November.

A WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* report on the reign of terror by management has been widely read and shared by workers on social media, and workers have continued to send in reports documenting the conditions in their hubs.

Lauren, a worker from Orlando, Florida, with a decade at UPS, described the conditions of speed-up and management harassment over the peak holiday season. "We have the revolving door of new hires," she said, "and the closer we get to peak season the less training they get. Some of them don't even know what can and cannot be sent across the belts. They're being moved around the building to different positions where they have no training."

"I'm pretty sure you'll probably find the same behavior in most hubs. Production becomes the top priority while safety goes out the window," she said. "I know we've had a few people lose fingers in the load in pinch points on rollers in the midnight shift." UPS has hired over 100,000 seasonal warehouse workers over peak season. The workers earn as little as \$10 per hour, often taking the job in hopes of landing a full-time position.

In early November, a driver at Lauren's hub died of a

heart attack as he was arriving at work. "He had previously had a heart attack," she said. "He had filed several grievances against the company about being overworked... On the way into work he collapsed in the pedestrian walkway, and by the time the paramedics got here, he could not be revived. The day before he passed away, he had filed another grievance for being forced to work overtime." She added: "We worked together."

The peak season, stretching from Thanksgiving in November to early January, is the most profitable portion of the year for the company, earning billions of dollars for its Wall Street shareholders and executives on the back of countless workers' ripped fingers, broken bones and deaths.

On October 23, Andy Schanding, a 43-year-old maintenance worker at the Lexington, Kentucky, UPS hub, was crushed to death while performing maintenance on a conveyor belt. The Teamsters and management have still not explained how Schanding was killed. His brother-in-law, Tim Dixon, himself a former UPS worker and now an autoworker in Kentucky, noted at the time that employers "squeeze every nickel" out of workers. "Companies are greedy," he said. "That's when mistakes are made."

This followed just weeks after the Teamsters announced it was defying the 54 percent "no" vote by members and imposing a sellout contract. The contract cut wages and undermined working conditions, creating a new tier of lower-paid "hybrid" warehouse/drivers.

Other workers have left comments on Facebook expressing their hostility to UPS management and the Teamsters. Liz commented in response to the WSWS report: "Sounds like a normal night at Under Paid

Slaves.” John commented: “And did anyone think differently on what they would do?” Paul said: “No such thing as the Teamsters union. It is the UPS union,” Adam said: “Union is trash, I didn’t hear one word from my local about the entire thing.”

At the UPS Freight subsidiary division, which employs almost 12,000 workers, management is laying off workers and idling hubs. In November, the Teamsters forced freight workers to vote again on a contract they had already rejected. They succeeded in forcing through the contract on the second try by threatening workers with the loss of their medical benefits and a lockout if they continued to resist the pro-company agreement.

Greg, a 21-year-old UPS Freight dockworker in Connecticut, who has been at the company for more than a year, said all the part-time workers are being laid off beginning today until the second week of January. These workers earn between \$12 and \$16 per hour.

“Management told us that UPS decided to lay off all the part-timers nation-wide,” he said. “They decided to shut down our whole hub. The only thing that will be running is outbound, to other parts of the country.”

“Because of UPS Teamsters on Facebook I’ve been talking to other workers around the country,” he said. “I spoke to one of the guys at Newburgh [in New York state]. He said they’re laying off a lot of people. He doesn’t even know what’s going to be happening next week. A lot of guys who have been there for 1–3 years won’t be there.

“We’ll get no pay and the medical insurance is gone. And that’s what a lot of us have been thinking. They’re trying to save money on insurance by laying off some of the part-timers and slowly some of the full-timers.” Countless workers and their families will have no money and no medication over this period.

Greg said management was justifying its actions with reference to the loss of customers arising from the company’s decision to empty all the freight from its system over a week in November. This action was taken—with the acquiescence of the Teamsters—as workers were voting a second time on the contract, in order to intimidate them with a threat of a lockout.

Greg said at his hub, workers had only voted “yes” the second time because the Teamsters had threatened they would lose their insurance otherwise.

“I know at my terminal what got it was when they

said they’d take away our insurance,” he said. “A lot of people from Albany, Stonum [Massachusetts], Springfield and Wallingford were all going to vote ‘no.’ We went down to vote at our union hall. What they said was, ‘you have to vote yes on this or there will be a lockout and you will lose your health insurance.’”

“The Teamsters weren’t fighting for us,” he added. “They decided, this is a great contract, so you guys have to take it.”

Greg is also attending college, and in order to pay for his course fees he has had to move back home with his parents. He has more than \$35,000 in debt from an earlier course at a private institution, which liquidated itself before he could complete his degree, saddling him with his student loans and no qualification.

“When I joined I thought the Teamsters, I thought it was great,” he said. “Now I wonder: What do they even do? I pay \$69 for dues every month. What does that go towards? We had a few guys about to join the union recently and we joked around. I told them, you’re going to notice the \$69 coming out of your check every month, and that goes towards paying for the Teamsters CEO’s new yacht.”

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