

“It's time for a realignment for the working class”

UPS workers talk to the WSWS ahead of contract expiration

Jacob Crosse
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Work at UPS? Tell us what you're fighting for in the next contract and why. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

With less than five months until the master contract for 350,000 UPS workers in the US expires on July 31, UPS workers tell the *World Socialist Web Site* that they are determined to fight for a “realignment for the working class” after decades of sellouts and betrayals.

Joe (name changed to protect his identity), a California warehouse worker who has worked at UPS for over two decades told the WSWS, “I reject the phrase, ‘A fair day's wage for a fair day's work.’ We make way more money for the corporation and the company than what we get back, even with pension contribution, and healthcare, we still make them way more than we get back.”

In their 2022 fourth quarter earnings statement, UPS announced that it was spending \$5 billion on share buybacks and that for the “14th consecutive year” the UPS Board of Directors had approved an *increase* to the company's quarterly dividend. According to UPS, in 2022 the company “returned \$8.6 billion of cash” to shareholders through “dividends and buybacks.”

Joe said: “We make so much capital for them, and what do we, the workers, have to show for it? A couple cent wage increases, a small percentage increase to 401k? There has to be a realignment for the working class.”

“Look back at 2008-2010,” he said. “Obama let the bankers off the hook who created the financial meltdown. Wall Street got bailed out, we got nothing.”

“Then there was COVID, and while they gave us something for a little bit, now there is no more child tax credit, no more stimulus checks...its BS. We live in a messed up society where the priorities are not aligned properly.”

These betrayals, Joe explained, went back decades and were undertaken by both big business parties with the Teamsters.

“I am no friend to the Democrats,” he said. “Have respect for the Republican Party. At least they tell me they're my enemy. They tell me they want to eliminate all the social nets for the working class. They want to get rid of everything that benefits the working class. So, at least I know what I am fighting. The Democratic Party, they give you lip service, then they turn around and pass these bills attacking the working class. From Bill Clinton and the 1994 Crime Bill and the destruction of the social safety net, the elimination of welfare.”

Speaking on the continuing attacks against workers, including through the deliberate raising of interest rates by the Federal Reserve, Joe explained, “Who does the raising of interest rates affect the most? Who is hurt by this price gouging? It's the worker. The government exists to protect corporations, not the workers.

“We are disposable” Joe said. “We are a disposable commodity. They use us up, until we can't move anymore, then get rid of us and it is ‘on to the next person.’”

“Once you have an injury -and you are going to get

injured, it is just a matter of time- just hope it is not a major one. Because the moment you start questioning, or bringing up a workplace injury, then they say, ‘Ok we’re good. You can go, you can get out of here. We will find somebody else to replace you.’”

Joe recounted the death last summer of young UPS driver 24-year-old Esteban Chavez Jr. On a sweltering July day where temperatures topped out in the high 90’s, Chavez Jr. collapsed inside his truck while delivering packages.

Joe explained that when UPS purchases their delivery trucks, “they come with air conditioning. Once [UPS] buys the truck, they take it out, because UPS thinks that with air conditioning workers will be ‘less effective.’”

Gerald (name also changed to protect his identity), a UPS warehouse worker from Los Angeles, also spoke to the WSWS about the working conditions and the hostile environment that persists in the warehouse. Under the nose of Teamsters officials, Gerald said that management is “constantly harassing” workers.

It is a “very hostile environment especially for these young kids,” Gerald explained. He said that when he tried to go to his Teamsters steward for help it went “nowhere.”

“It’s an uphill battle,” Gerald said. “I talk to one steward, I go and talk to different stewards, nothing. I made the mistake of talking to [Human Resources]. I talked to several Teamsters officers, that went nowhere.”

Gerald said that eventually, “I was cornered by management and a steward.” Since then there has been “constant harassment from management,” from degrading words to other forms of “verbal abuse.”

“I am a grown man, with a family and kids,” Gerald explained. “When my shirt is drenched and I am perspiring the whole time I am and there, and you are going to tell me, you have the nerve to say, I have a poor work ethic? It is one of those moments where you get a lump in your throat, and you just want to shake the guy.”

With the contract set to expire in just a few months, Gerald explained that the Teamsters bureaucracy had kept members “in the dark.” He said they are “trying to be so snakey about it. I haven’t seen a union rep in six months.”

Gerald talked about the betrayal of the rail workers struggle last year by the Democrats and the trade union bureaucrats. “I heard how the rail workers were done dirty by their unions, and got done over by the federal government,” Gerald said. “It’s capitalism. A whole bunch of bureaucrats running game and squashing everyone. It’s ridiculous.”

In order to prevent a similar betrayal, both workers expressed interest in forming an independent UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which would unite UPS workers across locals and states, in a common struggle against the corporation, government and Teamsters bureaucracy.

Joe especially agreed with the international perspective and character of the rank-and-file network, “If they can exploit a worker in China, they will exploit a worker in Taiwan, exploit a worker in Indonesia, in Haiti, in Mexico...”

“The union just wants people that won’t cause any waves,” Joe said. “When I first heard the idea of a Rank-and-File Committee, it got me really excited. I was thinking ‘this is something good.’”



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