

California UPS worker speaks out ahead of contract talks: “Now is the time for action”

Jacob Crosse
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Work at UPS? Tell us what your working conditions are like and what you are demanding in the next contract. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On July 31, the contract between the Teamsters and UPS covering more than 350,000 logistics workers in the US will expire. The current contract was unilaterally imposed in 2018 by the Teamsters after a majority of workers voted it down, angering workers who are determined to win back everything they have lost.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke with Gerardo, a warehouse worker, father and husband in Southern California, about what conditions at UPS are like and what he and other workers are demanding in the next contract.

“The alarm goes off at 3:15 a.m. From there, it’s getting ready for and going to work, hopefully arriving by 4:20 a.m.,” Gerardo said. “While I am lucky in that I live close to the hub, there are other workers who have to drive up to 15 miles to get to work.

“The pay-rate for a pre-loader [at my warehouse] is only \$17.50 an hour. A lot of workers are not happy with the pay rate for the work we do and one of the first things this new contract needs to have is an automatic 50 percent pay increase for every worker across the board.

“Getting to work is just the beginning though. With UPS, you are never secure with the hours you are going to work. They purposefully overstaff employees just so when everyone shows up, they can send the ones they don’t like home. If you don’t have seniority, you also get sent home.

“This is a big issue for a lot of workers. Imagine you are getting up at 3 o’clock in the morning, driving 15 miles to go to work, just to be told once you get there that you are not needed and to go home? All the time I hear them say, ‘We don’t need you. We are overstaffed. You can go home.’

“There is a security check [at the entrance]. They have you go through metal detectors. You have to pass your bag, your lunch through a scanner. Once you go through the security check, then you get to punch in with your ID. That shows up as a separate line on our paycheck.

“From there, it is a hike to my trailer. Usually, the walk takes about two-and-a-half to three minutes. If I had to guess, I would say the walk is well over a football field. Once I get there, I

have to clock-in at my station. There are a lot of stations *I could* clock-in to at the facility. The place is enormous. When I first started working there, I would clock-in at the station once you get through security. But then I was told I couldn’t do that,” because management did not consider his shift to have started until he was at his station, “and that I had to walk all the way across the facility to clock-in.

“Working in the trailer, they smash you up with, on average, about 700 boxes, which you are expected to load before first break. Our break isn’t until two hours after we clock-in. UPS likes it when you work through your break. It’s funny, they don’t have a bell, or a buzzer, to announce that it is time to go on break, but once the 10 minutes are up, a loud bell goes out throughout the facility reminding everyone to get back to work.

“Basically, the only way you know that it is break time is that the belt stops. There have been several days when it has been so backed up with packages, I have not been able to go on break. I know many pissed-off co-workers who inadvertently worked through their break because they were not aware it was break time.

“Working inside the trailers is no joke. The trailers are 100 feet long. While the boxes come in all shapes and sizes, the average weight is about 40–50 pounds [18–22 kilograms]. You would be surprised, it is usually the smaller size boxes that are the heavy ones. Those boxes will throw your back out if you lift them up wrong.

“UPS want us to stack the boxes as high as they can go, up to the top of the ceiling of the trailer. So we are constantly lifting these heavy boxes up over our heads, straining our shoulders, arms and backs. To say it is a workout would be an understatement. I am an athlete, I am constantly drenched in sweat, it is not easy. Even if you are sweating your ass off, the managers will constantly harass you if they feel like they are not getting enough effort out of you.

“Inside the trailer is nasty. You can see that the insulation on the ceiling is peeling. I have no idea what is in it—what I am breathing in—but I know it is not good. Even though we have a newer facility, the air filters are already clogged and full of dust and debris.

“UPS is constantly spraying for bugs inside the trailers. The stench of Raid [roach killer] is unbearable. I have told the

supervisors multiple times, I will not work inside a trailer that has been bombed with Raid.

“The working conditions are so bad, the abuse and harassment from the managers. I have considered calling OSHA, but I know they won’t do anything. The Teamsters officials, when I do see them—and they are hardly ever around, always rotating out—but when I do see them, they don’t care. Every time I have tried to file a grievance because of something UPS did, the Teamsters reps always tell me it’s past the time. They say it has exceeded the ‘statute of limitations’ even though managers harassing us is a daily thing.

“One way the company tries to save money, which the union doesn’t care about, is they will come around and ask anyone if they want to be cut loose early before the first break, so they don’t have to pay you for those 10 minutes. They want to work you as hard they can for two hours then cut you loose.

“For many of my co-workers though, they need the hours, yet they still get cut loose early. So obviously that gets them pretty pissed off, as anyone would understand. The pay is abysmal and it is just not worth it to be there for two hours.

“If you do stay, after break you have to finish off the trailer. Usually that means another 300 boxes need to be loaded for a total of about 1,000 boxes in three hours. After that you will get pulled to do ‘slow jobs’ which are usually the heavy boxes that can’t fit on the belt. For those big boxes, you have to load them on a cart and individually load them.

“I have worked other areas of the facility and no matter where you are, the exploitation is terrible. They have these quotas you have to meet, even as you are trying to lift these 100 pound, six-foot-long boxes. I actually hurt my back doing that, and UPS did not take down any documentation. They just told me to go home for a couple of days and rest up.

“I was new at the time, and didn’t think anything of it. Come to find out, I was helping the manager out by not reporting my injury; they get a bonus on a monthly basis for not having any reported injuries.

“But even if I wanted to report my injury, it’s not like I could go to Human Resources. They got rid of HR. Now they have a scam policy where basically they just try to butter you up and get you go home and ‘rest.’ It’s a win-win for the company, not only is there no paperwork establishing that you got injured on the job, but when you are home they are not paying you anyways.

“I will be honest, whenever I am at UPS, I am thinking ‘How am I going to get out of here?’ I hate being there, if I can get away with only being there for two hours a day I will take it.

“For insurance purposes, I try to get at least 10 hours a week, two hours every morning Tuesday through Saturday. The only reason I keep this job, one of three jobs that I have, is because I need the health insurance. As long as I keep those 10 hours, I get the health insurance.

“Even if I stayed and worked four hours every day, there is no way I could support my family only working at UPS. No

way in hell, the pay at UPS barely covers gas to get to work.

“In addition to UPS, I have two other jobs. Even working all the time, I can barely afford a ‘decent’ living for me and my family. It is not cheap feeding four kids, but it is not like we are eating steaks every night. The mortgage is getting paid and the kids are not going hungry, but I would not call that ‘decent.’”

Why UPS workers need to form rank-and-file committees

Gerardo expressed interest in the decision of workers in other industries to form rank-and-file committees to organize workers against both management and the pro-corporate union bureaucracy. “We need to join forces with other logistics workers and establish this Rank-and-File Committee. The Teamsters have proven they do not exist to hold the company accountable or to enforce the contract in our favor.

“Their job,” Gerardo explained, “is to sell the contract, no matter how bad it is, and sell their fake ‘brotherhood.’ It is a bunch of lies.”

With the talks between UPS and the Teamsters set to begin next month, Gerardo called for rank-and-file oversight over the negotiation process. “There is no reason a rank-and-file worker from every hub should not be in that room,” Gerardo said. “The negotiations can be livestreamed online so workers can view it in real time, in the open.

“There is no other way around it, we need to build up this committee. We can do this, first at a national level, with other workers, and then expand it. I have been reading the perspectives on the *World Socialist Web Site*. Conditions for workers are getting worse and worse all over the world and it won’t stop until we do something about it.”

“Whatever contract we agree to is what will set the standard for other logistics workers,” Gerardo added. “Now is the time for action, UPS, FedEx, Amazon workers, need to contact us now so we can begin communicating as a whole with other workers.”



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