

“UPS destroys human beings”: Current and former UPS workers speak out as contract deadline looms

Our reporters
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If you're a UPS worker, we want to hear from you! Tell us what you are demanding in the upcoming contract, and what you think about the contract talks so far. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

With a July 31 strike deadline looming at UPS, 340,000 workers across the United States are determined to win back concessions bargained away over generations by the pro-corporate bureaucracy of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The new union administration of Sean O'Brien, backed by the “reform” caucus Teamsters for a Democratic Union, portrays itself as a break with the union's past of corruption, and has repeatedly pledged to strike UPS on August 1 if no deal is in place by the end of the previous day, when the current contract expires. But in reality, this militant rhetoric is designed to conceal the fact that the bureaucracy is working overtime to get a deal in place before then, averting a strike. Last week, the union's negotiators violated their own pledge to not begin talks on the national contract until dozens of regional supplemental deals had been completed.

This is a sign that the bureaucracy is under extreme pressure to get a deal done, including from the White House, which worked with Congress to ban a strike by US railroaders. At the same time, the Teamsters bureaucracy is also isolating and selling out strikes by Coca-Cola and Sysco workers, while forbidding members from participating in the pickets of striking television and movie writers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke with a current UPS warehouse worker and a retired UPS driver about the upcoming contract, working conditions at the logistics giant and their opinion of the Teamsters

bureaucracy.

“UPS destroys human beings,” the retired driver, who lives in the Washington D.C. area, said. “We are constantly harassed and asked to do work that is beyond the capacity of human beings to accomplish.”

The company often coerces workers to do “free labor.” Workers are pressured to come in hours before a shift in order to set up their vehicles for the day. “Go to a UPS facility any day, about 2 hours before shifts start. You'll see people that the company got to come in early and work off the clock.”

The retired worker explained that doing this allows workers to get a head start on their deliveries, and also adds pressure on others who insist on only working while on the clock.

He stated “too many people have died” working for the company. This is due to having to work in unventilated areas with carbon monoxide buildup, as well as other abuses. He cited one worker who had a mental illness stemming from his experience in the military. “He was harassed by his supervisor like we all are,” he explained. “He committed suicide. He had worked at the company for 5 years.”

“More than once I've had to get physical at my job,” he explained, referring to having to physically defend himself when managers became abusive.

“The [current] contract negotiations will end the way they always do,” he said. “The drivers may get more money, but none of the conditions will be addressed.”

He explained that UPS will “never” allow air conditioning to be installed in the trucks, despite well-documented cases of workers collapsing and dying from heat exhaustion. He cited a company policy which demanded that the trucks be turned off when not in

motion.

“The company leans on you,” he said. While 14 sick days are provided at UPS, he “had to beg and plead for them” whenever he wanted to claim one. “If a manager doesn’t like you, he won’t put in for it [when you claim it],” meaning a worker will be denied pay for taking a sick day off.

“I’ve seen managers fire an entire car wash crew—10 or 11 guys—just because they didn’t have any work that day.” He stated that being “put in the street,” where a worker is fired by managers and has to appeal to the union to be reinstated, is a frequent occurrence that causes workers to miss pay periods.

“The union knows about this, but I don’t think it cares,” he said. He explained that UPS will show “favoritism” to Teamster shop stewards in order to get them to act in the company’s favor. “They usually can get off any time they want. I’ve even seen union guys going off to exercise with management,” he said.

A pre-loader working in a Los Angeles-area hub said, “From what I have heard most of the supplemental contracts are already concluded. They don’t want to be transparent on the national contract. Of course, the Teamsters are doing everything behind closed doors. There is no help coming from them. They are coming up with all of these excuses.

“That is a part of the whole manipulation that the Teamsters do. They give us sorry updates on the contract, you know they say stuff that will tickle the [rear] a little bit but not bring you to a conclusion.”

Speaking on the current contract, he said, “Every day, management constantly breaks the contract without consequences.” As the expiration of the current contract draws near, “The working environment within the facility is absolutely getting worse.”

“They have started limiting hours. They are doing these rotations where they send people home on one of their scheduled days every week. For me, I don’t really care, they can keep the \$40, I am here for the medical and dental insurance.

“But for many it is a big deal and a huge stress. Not only are management pushing this ‘job security’ fear, but by forcing everyone home one day a week, they are taking away our ability to earn a bonus for working five consecutive scheduled shifts in one week.

“We used to get a \$98 bonus, but then the Teamsters reduced that to \$63. Not much, but still something. But

now they have dropped it to like \$40. So basically, with these new rotations, they are saving \$40 on every worker, not much to the corporation, but for many young workers, that is significant.”

On top of the reducing hours, “Management keeps on playing games,” he said. “Instead of taking away the Saturday I am normally scheduled, which I requested in advance so I can be with my kids, they are making me stay later on Saturday.”

“It is ridiculous how much these corporations are getting away with. I am fucking sick of it; they have these schemes and scams. Every God damn day.

“We don’t have a choice. As workers, our power is in our unity. The unity of the working class, the building of a UPS Rank-and-File Committee, needs to start now. We need to begin getting a footprint across all of the UPS hubs.”



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