

California UPS driver describes conditions ahead of July 31 strike deadline

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Are you a UPS worker? Tell us what your conditions are like and what you're demanding in the upcoming contract. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

With the contract for 340,000 UPS workers set to expire July 31, workers at the logistics giant are determined to win back decades of concessions given up to the company. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, headed by new General President Sean O'Brien, has pledged to strike UPS if a new deal is not in place by July 31, but is clearly straining to get a deal before then to block a strike. The bureaucracy has already violated its own pledge not to begin national contract talks until all regional supplemental agreements have been completed, a clear sign that it is under pressure to keep the rank-and-file under control.

Andrew, a full time driver, has been working at UPS for 26 years in Southern California. He explained to the WSWS the way in which the Teamsters bureaucracy has long been working in tandem with management and assisted with the decline in working conditions at the company as well as the expansion of the multi-tiered wage system. His name has been changed to protect his identity.

Under the current contract, imposed in 2018 against a "no" vote by the membership, drivers are divided into two separate tiers, full time and "hybrids." Full time drivers are called regular package car driver (RCPD), work Monday through Friday and make about \$42 an hour wages, at least double that of hybrid drivers also known as "22.4's" who split their time between deliveries and working in the warehouses. These drivers top out at \$35.94 an hour.

Next in the tier system is the Cover Driver. When needed, they fill in for drivers who are out on vacation or sick and complete their routes. Cover drivers make 70 percent of the top rate of \$42.33, and after 6 months

make 75 percent of the top rate, or \$31.75

Andrew said that the most concerning are Personal Vehicle Drivers (PVDs), which is gig work similar to Amazon or Uber Eats, where workers use their personal vehicles to drop off packages. "We need to get rid of PVDs" he said, "they are very dangerous, people drive up in their cars as they are out walking around the yard, while we are trying to maneuver our big vehicles"

Andrew said that the sentiment among workers is to get rid of the PVDs and all of the lower tiers and to bring all drivers up to the highest tier. But the Teamsters bureaucrats, he says, regularly attempt to instill fear into workers and ignore these demands. "Our union scares them and tells them not to support this call, because 'those people want to get rid of 22.4s, and then [the lower tier will] be out of the job.'"

He also described intimidation from management as well as union officials. Harassment is also a daily occurrence with management constantly scolding drivers for going too slow.

"The pandemic was really difficult," he said. "They worked us 14 hours days, while management acted like Covid didn't exist. Everything took longer to deliver. A lot of people didn't want to share elevators, for instance, but they kept pushing us and a lot of guys. Their bodies are completely broken. The 14-hour days were really hard on people's families."

Andrew said that RCPDs are only supposed to work Monday through Fridays, but during the busiest times of the pandemic, UPS wanted them to work Saturdays. The Teamsters acted as labor police pressuring RCPD to come in to work.

"What's happening is they are going heavy on Saturdays [when RCPDs don't work] and they slam the 22.4's and part timers on Saturdays and hurry it all out, giving them routes with 160 stops. Then on Monday

they tell us [RCPDs] that there's not enough work, dissolve dozens of routes, and ask people if they want to stay home. Since a lot of people are happy to take a three-day weekend they will just say yes, but they are doing this on purpose."

More recently Andrew said that there have been waves of layoffs in advance of the contract expiration. "They are laying off preloaders and cover drivers. They tell us they are lacking business, but this is a scare tactic to create infighting and have us fighting over time."

Andrew said that there is a good expectation among workers that there will be a strike, and the layoffs and threats of lack of work by UPS are to instill fear and are part of an attempt to preemptively break their fight.

Andrew described the main issues in the contract as Health and Safety Protections and the need for a stronger grievance process. "The grievance process is a joke. We need strong language and a stop to the extreme harassment."

On the question of wages, he noted this was a major issue for the part timers who are demanding \$25 an hour and a simultaneously increase to all wage scales. Additionally, "22.4s don't make time and a half on Saturdays, and they should, which is what I'm paid if I work on a Saturday. Work also needs to be distributed more evenly, so people aren't doing 12 hours days."

Andrew spoke to the numerous dangers on the job including heat stroke which killed Los Angeles Driver Esteban Chavez last year. "We are dealing with so many variables—traffic, the weather, they are pushing us to do more stops per hour and even telling guys they need to do more. They are intimidating the new guys, saying they should be doing 20 stops an hour when the average is 16."

"I work near the coast and for the first time this past summer I had to pull over [due to heat]. Some people don't want to acknowledge global warming, but it is getting hotter ever year."

"They come and harass people and tell them 'This is the slowest you've been in six months.' They are breaking people down, and then they blame people for getting injured. They send warning letters to people which is illegal. All they care about is production. They don't care if you drop dead, and by they I mean both the union bureaucrats and management."

The safety question is bound with an end to the harassment over productivity. Pressure to meet hourly drop-off numbers mean that health and safety are not considered." Andrew noted that "ACs in all the vehicles are needed, to stop people from dying on the job." The demand for air conditioning in delivery trucks is particularly widespread among drivers.

Another central concern is the threat of having their healthcare suspended if they are not working. Healthcare coverage is tied to hours worked and can be cut off if workers don't log enough hours, he said. There must be a stop to this put concretely in the contract.

Andrew also demanded that PVDs be removed from the new contract, as well as all casual work classifications.



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