

# “We are exploited all the time”: New York City UPS workers speak out as July 31 contract deadline draws closer

**Our reporters**  
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*Work at UPS? We want to hear from you. Tell us what you’re demanding in the upcoming contract by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

The contract for 340,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) workers is set to expire on July 31, only two months away. UPS workers across the country, like the working class as a whole, has watched its living standards plummet for generations, and are determined to win back decades of concessions made to the multi-billion-dollar logistics giant.

All of this was made possible by the treacherous, pro-company bureaucracy of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which has given away everything won by workers in earlier periods of explosive class struggles. In 2018, the Teamsters bureaucracy accepted and implemented the current concessionary UPS contract against an overwhelming rejection by the rank-and-file.

The new Teamsters administration, headed by President Sean O’Brien with key support from the pseudo-left Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) caucus, is posturing as militant and even “left,” pledging to strike if no new deal is in place by July 31. But it is no less committed to the company’s bottom line than previous administrations. O’Brien and his gang have spent the last year enforcing the dictates of the ruling class and its state, playing a critical role in the banning of a national rail strike and strangling the struggles of countless workers across the continent.

Last week, UPS workers from Local 804 in New York City spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* about the conditions they face in the most expensive city in the world and the struggle ahead.

A UPS trailer loader who had just finished a work shift told WSWs reporters, “The conditions for workers here are horrible. We are doing very heavy labor, and we only

get paid \$16 an hour in New York City. One worker here does double shifts every day just to keep his house because \$16 an hour is so little money.”

“I load trailers, not trucks,” he continued. “Each trailer holds 3,500 or more packages. The weight of the vast majority of these packages ranges from 50 pounds to 90 pounds or more. There should be six or seven people a night doing this work. But because our pay is so low, people don’t show up a lot. We should have three people in the trucks, two people scanning and one pushing the packages down the conveyor belt. Tonight, we had five people, and we still loaded four trailers. After we finish a trailer, which is generally about 45 minutes or an hour’s work, we get a 10-minute break. That is all. Just 10 minutes, and we are back loading the next trailer.

“There is one person unloading one trailer by himself, and then he gets a 10-minute break. What is a 10-minute break when there is no stopping?

“The equipment we are working with is breaking down. When it does, and we put in a request for it to be fixed, it may not get fixed before the end of our shift. The conveyor systems are really old. We have to bend down to take the packages off the low conveyor belts. We have workers with bad backs and shoulder injuries as a result. The manual conveyor belts are old and have been here for years.

“Sometimes we have to lift the manual conveyor belt up and put it back on so it works. I think that is a maintenance job. When they can’t fix it, we tell the supervisor, and many times it doesn’t get fixed on our shift. Then we have to use another conveyor belt. We always have to have someone pushing the packages down the manual conveyor belt, and if we use the automatic conveyor somebody has to be there because it jams.

“What goes on here is the hardest work ever. We are

exploited all the time, and there are cameras already where we work. We work carefully because we can't afford to get injured. You can't miss a day because the week's pay is barely enough to pay the rent and bills. They need to pay us more money. \$20 an hour would be a start.

Asked about the ongoing contract negotiations the worker said, "When you hear about the contract, it is mostly 'he says, she says.' I barely see my shop steward. I generally ask my supervisor. Raising our pay would bring more workers in. With a pay increase, I might work OT.

"The union only represents those closest to the company. I lift 120-pound boxes, only get 10-minute breaks and get paid \$16 an hour. People like me who do the really hard work, they don't represent us."

The Teamsters have pledged not to begin negotiations on the national agreement until all regional supplemental deals have been bargained for. The union, however, violated its own pledge when it began national talks with two regional deals still outstanding. But even for those supplemental deals which have been agreed to, workers have not seen anything concrete.

A tractor trailer driver, when asked about the Local 804 Supplemental Contract, said, "I heard it has two more sick days in it." Asked what more was in it and when the union would present it to the rank and file, he replied, "We don't know too much more." Workers are being left in the dark as the bureaucracy and management meet behind closed doors to cobble together contracts that fall far from meeting the needs of workers.

A 10-year warehouse worker advocated a contract with base pay for workers of almost \$25 an hour. "For this contract, they should establish a base salary that pays \$24.50 an hour, and see if that doesn't work retaining workers and keep them coming to work. People are looking for money today. UPS is losing workers to Target and FedEx because they pay more. The health care here doesn't count for that much.

"Neither the company nor the union want to listen to a 10-year worker like me. Now workers come in at \$17 an hour if they raise the minimum wage. Maybe they could pay you \$21 an hour while they train you like they do with the drivers. But they would have to train you well. The scanner equipment dies because they haven't trained the worker properly. Training is critical. It is like getting into the union where it takes 40 days of work to get in the union. Then they rob you.

"UPS made \$14 billion last year. It is money that

attracts people, but it is Target that trains people at \$18 and \$19 an hour. And here it is only a select few who get chosen for extra pay and work. When I started here, I used to stay until 10 or 11 a.m."

A pre-loader who has worked a few months at UPS commented, "We are getting \$15.50 an hour. Our wages should be at least \$20 an hour."

Another loader coming off of a work shift commented, "I can't get by on just this job. As a part-timer I make well under a living wage in this city. Many of us work two, three jobs. I've actually got a shift at Dairy Queen later today.

"I've got a son that I have to look after, and they don't make it easy for me here. My son was sick the other day and I didn't come to work. I just found out that they have suspended me because of that."

Commenting on the contract negotiations, the worker said, "We don't have a dog in the race. I've been here since 2019 and know what they did with this contract we are currently working under. It stinks and we need something better, but these guys [bureaucrats] will only look after themselves."

Speaking about the formation of rank-and-file committees independent of the union apparatus and democratically controlled by the rank and file, uniting UPS workers with the working class more broadly, the worker said, "I think this is something that workers here will get behind. What we need is all the workers united. The different tiers that we have are meant to divide us up, but we are all in the same boat and have to take the initiative to move things forward."

When asked about contract developments before starting his shift, a delivery driver stated, "This contract we have now is trash! We got nothing and aren't getting anything if this keeps up."



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