

“It is like one big sweatshop”: Yellow worker describes horrendous working conditions at near-bankrupt freight company

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The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding a meeting this Sunday at 6pm eastern to support the fight by 22,000 Yellow freight workers. Register for the event by clicking here.

Do you work at Yellow, ABF or another freight carrier? Tell us about your working conditions and compensation by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The Yellow Corporation, the largest freight trucking company in the US, is currently conducting negotiations with the Teamsters union to extract massive concessions from the workers. The company has over \$1.6 billion in debt. Over \$1 billion of their debt is due this year and Wall Street is demanding massive concessions in exchange for refinancing. It is widely expected that Yellow may declare bankruptcy in the next month or two, threatening the jobs of the company's more than 20,000 workers.

The Teamsters bureaucracy is prepared to grant concessions but is facing fierce opposition from the workers. The Teamsters have already granted the company billions in concessions, including massive cuts to pensions.

The Teamsters are posturing as opponents to further concessions, General President Sean O'Brien has declared that they have given the company enough. In reality, as the company moves closer to bankruptcy and the workers face losing their jobs, it will be easier to push through another concessions contract.

The crisis at Yellow has erupted during the final weeks before the expiration of the contract at UPS covering 340,000 workers. UPS workers are determined to win historic gains on wages and working conditions. The Teamsters bureaucracy has been compelled to pledge it would strike by August 1 if a deal is not in place by then. However, they have kept workers completely in the dark since talks started and will no doubt use the final two weeks to try to work out a deal at the 11th hour. In response, workers last week founded the UPS Workers Rank-and-File

Committee to unify workers against the betrayals of the apparatus.

David, a young worker who works at a Yellow warehouse in Ohio contacted the *World Socialist Web Site* to talk about the conditions they are forced to work under. We have changed the name of the worker to protect his identity.

“The conditions at the Yellow freight warehouse should be exposed, it absolutely should be exposed. I quit my old job to work here, it was the worst choice I ever made.”

David says the mistreatment of employees begins even before you step in the door. “When they interview you, they leave out a lot of things. You don't get PTO [Paid Time Off] until you've worked here an entire year. If you call off, are a few minutes late or you leave a few minutes early they call you into the dock office and write you up.

“They expect you not to take any time off. Nothing if you get sick. Nothing if you have to care for somebody. Nothing.

“They have it set so if you call off, you will not get paid. You get called into the dock office. You get a letter. It is horrible how they treat you. They don't ever call you to the office to say something good.

“The supervisors have no respect for you. It is a union job, but we have no rights.

“My mother called in tears to tell me they're taking my son to the hospital, they found him in his room unresponsive. I was so upset that I couldn't think of anything else and clocked out five minutes early.

“The next day they called me into the dock office and gave me a letter. They never asked why I left or asked me how he was. They don't ask you for the reason. They never asked why I left early, because they just don't care.

“The work is grueling, and the pay is low. Like warehouse jobs everywhere, the company provides no climate control. In the winter the dock is freezing and in the summer the heat is unbearable.”

“It is like one big sweatshop,” David said. “The morale there is horrible, no one is happy with the job.”

The warehouse is a 24/7 operation, with shifts starting at 8 a.m., 4p.m. and midnight.

“You have to work 10 hours every day. I worked the 4:00 p.m. shift. I am supposed to get off at 12, but they force you to work till 2:00 a.m. and you can stay till 4:00 a.m. That means you’re working 10 hours every day, sometimes 12. They don’t care what that means for your life.

“The heat during the summer is unbearable. You are working on the dock and there are 178 doors open. I am in and out of the hot trailers all night long.”

David repeatedly came back to the point that management didn’t care about the conditions the workers were working under.

“They know that but they don’t care,” David said. “When it’s hot you are inside the trailer, sweating. The dock is very humid and hot.”

These conditions are compounded by the fact that they work mostly by themselves. “Everyone pretty much works alone. The items can be any weight. They will vary in weight or size. If you need some help, someone will usually help you, but for the most part you are alone.

“I’ve had trailers filled with transmissions that still had the oil inside. It was leaking out all over the place. It was a mess and dangerous. Another trailer, the equipment inside was over 2,000 pounds. We use forklifts, but that is another thing because you are constantly getting up and down out of the forklift to adjust it.”

Asked about injuries on the job, David said that he hasn’t himself been hurt, but that he saw another worker get injured. “Yesterday something fell on him. They didn’t take him to the hospital. They took him to the dock office and made him fill out some forms, then they called a nurse they have working for them. She comes and asks him a whole bunch of more questions to determine if he should go to the hospital.

“That doesn’t make any sense to me. This is wasting a lot of time when they should take people to the hospital right away.”

David and the other dock workers make just \$19.47 an hour. “The company is trying to pressure people to give up more money. We gave up our pensions and they are still coming back for more. It is crazy.

“I pay union dues and it has not benefited me. I don’t feel it is working. This is the lowest paid freight company. Everybody is paying more. We get paid \$19.47. Everybody else starts at \$23. It is very frustrating.

“They pay every week. The only way I see a half decent paycheck is if I work 12 hours a day and come in on a Sunday and a Saturday. I worked seven days to see what my paycheck would look like. It is sad that you have to work like that.

“Penn Ohio is non-union and they are starting their warehouse workers at \$23 an hour. Yellow is the biggest freight company but paying the lowest wages.

“The break room has two refrigerators for all the employees, it is not fit for animal food let alone for employees. In the bathrooms the soap is watered down. We tell them about it but no one is doing anything about it. It seems they don’t care.”

David said that a female co-worker told him that the sink in their bathroom was clogged. She needed to wash tar off of her hands and arms.

“I asked her if she reported it to management and she said ‘Why? They’re not going to do anything.’”

“I am finding myself dreading going into work, I know a lot of people are not happy. You’re supposed to get health benefits after 12 weeks. I am still not receiving them. I ask about it and they don’t tell me anything. I looked into it. They have some kind of reprieve where they don’t have to pay for medical or pensions for a couple of months. They are running out of money in August.

“So, there are thousands and thousands of people who are losing their benefits. These are people who have worked for 20 and 30 years and they are losing their health benefits and pensions.

“When COVID came, we were called essential workers. The government bailed the company out. They got like \$700 million. Now they are broke again. They mismanaged it and they want us to give again. It is affecting the employees.

“This is what this whole fight is about. The company wants the workers to bail them out again. People are so confident, so conditioned it is just a lot of faith in these people. Anything can happen at this point.”

When asked what he thought about forming a rank-and-file committee at Yellow to organize workers independently of the union apparatus, David responded. “I think it’s a good idea. I’m definitely for fighting against bad conditions. This has to stop.”



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