

# UPS workers in Chicago and New York speak out: “Sean O’Brien talks out of both sides of his mouth and insults us with this garbage contract”

**George Marlowe**  
13 August 2023

*Attend the online public meeting, “The ‘No’ vote at UPS and the next stage of the battle against the Teamsters bureaucracy,” hosted by the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, this Sunday at 7pm Eastern. Register for the event [here](#).*

*Take up the fight against the contract and the sellout union bureaucrats by joining the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee. To contact the committee, email [upsrnkandfilecommittee@gmail.com](mailto:upsrnkandfilecommittee@gmail.com) or fill out the form below.*

UPS workers in Chicago and New York spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* over the weekend about the national tentative agreement, as well as the low pay and poor working conditions they face daily.

While the Teamsters bureaucracy led by Sean O’Brien and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have hailed the contract agreement as “historic,” rank-and-file workers across the country have opposed the sellout deal as completely inadequate to meet their needs with the cost-of-living crisis they face.

Many workers in Chicago and New York already make more today under UPS market-rate adjustments (MRAs) than the starting wage brought back by the Teamsters of \$21 an hour. These MRA pay raises are carried out by UPS management itself because the existing contractual pay rates are so low they are unable to attract enough workers in areas with high costs of living.

Part-time workers and drivers at one of the largest UPS facilities in the country, known as the Chicago Area Consolidation Hub (CACH), spoke out against the low pay and horrendous working conditions they endure. Opened in 1995, the massive 240-acre UPS complex just southwest of the city of Chicago in Hodgkins, Illinois, was formerly a General Motors Truck and Bus manufacturing plant. It is currently the largest packing/sorting facility in the world.

Over 9,000 part-time workers—many between the ages of 17 and 25—work at the giant CACH facility to sort and handle the packages that come through, and a number of feeder drivers also stop there, handling over 10 percent of nationwide UPS package volume. Packages also come into the facility via the intermodal rail terminals, including BNSF, CSX, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific.

## Chicago: “UPS exploits workers like us”

“I’ve been here since May,” one young part-time worker said. “It’s really been a lot—physically demanding, even if you wanted a part-time

schedule. Sometimes we actually have to deal with what we’re given. They want everything to be perfect.

“Physically, it will leave me drained. I work other jobs because I need other sources of income. When the sort is light, it’s okay. When it’s really heavy, and it’s hot in all the trucks, that’s when it becomes a lot more physically demanding. Sometimes we’re short-staffed due to people not feeling well, or we just don’t have enough people.”

When it came to the UPS-Teamsters contract agreement, the young part-time worker said, “The contract—I did like it at first, but then I thought about it,” he said. “Over the span of five years, it’s not guaranteed that I’m still going to be here.

“Honestly, I think we should be making between \$27-35. I’m not the only person who feels like that. It’s a lot of people that work here that have a lot of personal things going on in their lives. And they need the money. In this day and age, it’s really hard to try and get by. You can’t live somewhere without having to pay an arm and a leg. I do think it would be a positive incentive to give it their all to be able to make a real living.

“The cost of living,” he added, is making it harder to survive with the low pay. With roommates, “I pay about \$400 for rent right now, but I’m moving out so I’m going to be paying \$1,500. I currently have 4 jobs. I do a lot to have an income flowing in so I can make sure I’m straight and I can get back and forth to work and I’m okay.”

A number of workers also reported they have not even seen the contract or gotten any information about the vote from Teamsters Local 705.

“I’ve worked here since November, and I was hoping for more pay,” one worker said. “I was hoping for up to \$30. We work pretty hard, and it’s a lot of work. It’s hot inside, and we put a lot of work in. I’m 18, and I’m enrolling in college this semester. I don’t think it’s right that the companies keep making these profits. I haven’t seen the contract yet—they sent me a text or something. They didn’t say anything about the vote.

“It takes me 25 minutes to get here. Gas, I spend \$60 a week. It’s pretty expensive. Gas prices are going up. For a better future, I want a nicer house. I want to afford one. I hope the prices drop. Everything’s going up. I currently live with my mom. I’m just trying to save as much money as I can and helping my mom out.”

Another part-time worker said, “I’ve worked here for about a year. I’m 18 and a high school student. I want to work here for a couple more years. But it’s a really hard job here. You’ve got to fill up all the trailers with super heavy boxes.

“It’s not really worth it for the pay right now. I live really far, almost an hour drive for me. Basically, half of what I get paid in a day goes straight to my gas tank. It would be good if we can get a big raise. They’re

making too much money—they should help us. The dust here I feel a lot in my lungs and my nostrils. It's really a health risk. You never know what could be in those particles and what's going in your body.'

A young 25-year-old student and UPS worker said, "Right now I'm making \$22 an hour," he said. "But [compared to what part-timers made in 1978, adjusted for inflation] you're saying we should be making \$37-38 an hour today? That's what we should be making. I agree. I'm 25, and I'm studying in school as well and want to make more than this.

"UPS exploits workers like us. It's crazy. They made billions in profits too. They're increasing their shipping costs too. If it goes to \$30 an hour, that would be good. Their profits come from us. I travel 30-40 minutes to come here. A decent amount goes into gas. We have inflation, and our wages have not been keeping up."

### **"Sean O'Brien talks out of both sides and insults us with this garbage contract"**

A sleeper driver at UPS CACH also spoke out. "It's terrible in CACH. I've never been at a place that works so hard at firing people. They enjoy firing people. They steal your money then from you. It's crazy how they do it.

"It used to be that per contract language, if you were at CACH, you got 45 minutes for fueling and washing the truck. Now, or if you're off property, you get 30 minutes to put fuel in your truck. Eight months ago they changed that wily-wily and paid only for time spent.

"We didn't get anything out of the contract. We got \$7.50 for five years. I got nothing because I'm a year out of progression. Progression should only be two years, period. It should only be for people with no experience. My partner has been there for four years. I've got 17 years of industry experience more than him. He makes way more a week than I do. If you're in progression, you don't get COLA [cost-of-living adjustments]. That's how they treat their employees. If you work there no matter how long, you should get a cost-of-living raise, just like anybody. Everybody has a cost of living with inflation and the economy.

"I call [Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien] SOB, James P. Hoffa Jr.," he said. "During his campaign, I said it was too much BS. Everybody told me you gotta give him a chance. Sean O'Brien talks out of both sides and insults us with this garbage contract. If you roll through Nebraska, there's giant signs on Walmart for \$30 jobs, for warehouse workers. They can't get anyone. And UPS wants to pay \$21.

"SOB said we're not going to take concessions ... that's why he won. All of a sudden, two weeks ago, after they got that miracle TA in 24 hours [after negotiations re-started], they had a Zoom call to tell us about the TA. They had comments and questions locked off. They told us we know what's best for you so vote 'yes' and everyone will be happy. Just like normal politicians. SOB makes over \$300,000 and has three pensions. Our pensions are getting cut and frozen.

"Our local negotiation committee got called to Washington. Under no circumstances were they going to get a better contract than the national, the IBT wouldn't approve it. SOB has got his hands in our contract. If we can get a better contract, there should be more power to us, but SOB won't allow that.

"The majority of the workers who've been there for some time are really unhappy, basically they get a buck an hour. I hope they stick to their guns and vote it down. It also seems like the majority of CACH is going to vote it down.

"We did a poll on Telegram, and 87 percent who took the poll said they're voting no. Whether they do that is another matter. I don't know how many people were in the poll. As far as feeder drivers, we got no

language protecting our jobs. UPS could put everything back on the train and go to contractors and lay us all off. I'll guarantee when this is over—talking to guys who've been there a while—they'll lay off a couple guys, because they can."

He added his opposition to the two-tier system for part-time workers. "Part-time workers: They're breaking people up," he said. "Making one group dislike the other. You're making less money than me, but why should you? That's why we don't like the progression. If we're doing the same job, we should get the same money."

Rank-and-file workers tried to organize and write down their demands at CACH. He added, "For eight months we worked on our proposals together, we made typed sheets, and we had proposals signed by each member. We put in 1,500 different sheets. Each person had five to six things that they were interested in and marked it by number of importance. Not one of those things was addressed!

"My parents were both members of the UAW, and they struck a couple of times," he said. "They always seemed to get what they wanted. I was in a union with guys that started in the 1940s. Their opinion was you always voted down the first one. There was always more to get. That's when unions were powerful. That's when being in the union meant something. Then people like Hoffa Jr. and SOB take control and other stooges who are company-minded or government-controlled, and they're more interested in power than the people they represent."

### **New York: "I voted 'No' on the contract"**

Reporters also spoke to UPS workers in New York. A two-year package handler spoke out against the low pay and insulting contract terms brought back by the Teamsters apparatus. "I want money. I need money," the worker said. "It is all about the money for part-time workers. The hours are odd. They don't even correspond to the truck movements.

"When I started, I made \$15 an hour. Then when I had worked one year I got a raise to \$16.65. I should get another raise this year. If anyone starting now makes \$21 an hour, don't I get an additional raise for the two years I have worked here? I am a package handler on the slide and conveyer belt. I have asked around a lot, but nobody knows. I didn't go to the shop steward because I never felt like it at the end of my shift.

"I am tired, my back hurts, and I just want to go home. I voted 'No' on the contract. Aren't we supposed to get paid for the time we have worked? I heard UPS made profits that were huge when I started. It is still going on. I know they have certain expenses they have to pay with their profits, but I look for fairness. I just want to be able to afford what I need. I need food, water and shelter. \$21 an hour doesn't get me there. \$300 a week is not good for anything.

"I have to get another part-time job which is just as bad, but you still can't survive. A lot of part-time workers are working split shifts, and that is crazy too. In terms of the union, I want to know where the money is going. The meetings are too far away. They are in Long Island when I live in the Bronx. I know I can never figure out where my tax dollars go, but this is a union. And I want to know where my union dues go."

*Take up the fight against the contract and the sellout union bureaucrats by joining the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee. To contact the committee, email [upsrankandfilecommittee@gmail.com](mailto:upsrankandfilecommittee@gmail.com) or fill out the form below.*



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**