

Under new contract, former UPS air drivers in Northern Virginia working in record heat for nearly 50 percent less pay

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Provide testimony to the Rank-and-File Investigation into the UPS Contract by emailing upsrankandfilecommittee@gmail.com. No identifying information will be published without your explicit consent.

Conditions are worsening for former air UPS drivers in the Washington, DC area, a month after some told the *World Socialist Web Site* that UPS had cut their pay in half before the ratification of a new national contract.

These workers had formerly worked as air drivers before being transferred by the company to other lower-tier positions. While these positions normally pay far less, management had assured them that they would keep their former wage levels. But shortly before the new five year contract was ratified, under suspicious circumstances, last month, management reneged on this promise, nearly halving their pay overnight. Since the new contract has gone into effect, the workers have been bumped up to \$21.50 an hour, with an insulting 50 cents additional pay due to seniority. This is far less than the new top rate for air drivers, which is \$36.69.

Nationwide, the company has been steadily eliminating air driver positions, a part time job which topped out at over \$30 in past contracts. This has led workers to describe the position, which involves the pick up and delivery of air packages too difficult for regular package delivery drivers to reach, as an “endangered species” at the company.

To protect them from retaliation, workers interviewed for this article will be referred to by their initials, rather than their real names.

“We are working harder [now] than ever before,” said J, a former Air Driver at the Dulles UPS hub in Northern Virginia. “It’s so scorching hot in here” they

said, referring to the loading docks where they had been transferred to from the air driver position.

In the first week of September, the unofficial beginning of fall, temperatures reached nearly 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius). According to the *Washington Post*, the Labor Day weekend was “one of our hottest... on record” in the D.C. area.

“They want us to do a five-hour job in 2.5 hours” while working at half the pay they previously received stated Z., another worker at the facility. “It’s like a sweatshop or a jail here.”

After the pay reduction, these workers are near poverty-levels. Between the time when his pay was cut and when the contract’s new wages took effect, J said his pay had been reduced to \$18.75. “I made \$18.75 an hour in 2016,” said J, meaning that the pay cut had eliminated nearly 7 years’ worth of wage progression.

“About a year ago I was reclassified as ‘car wash,’” a position which receives less pay, said J. “I was told at the time that I would keep my pay rate.”

“My heart is not in this job anymore,” said Z. “It’s like they’re trying to get rid of us. It’s so hot in here. You’re sweaty. People are so aggressive here. I could work at Walmart as a greeter and receive the same pay I currently receive.”

Asked if the Teamsters union were helping them to recover their pay, the workers were told “keep filing grievances,” with no further directions given. “I’ve got to ask the questions,” J said. “Nobody else knows anything.” Z also described managers “avoiding us like the plague” whenever confronted about lost pay.

In an interview earlier this month, UPS CEO Carol Tomé revealed the real beneficiaries of the contract. “It’s not a \$30 billion deal,” she said, stating that the

cost of the wage increases only will make a direct impact during the first year, raising costs by 46 percent, then “it steps back down.”

“Imagine what the last four years of the contract are,” she said, mentioning the declining wage pay. Tomé said the deal was “good for us,” meaning the shareholders and investors, not the workers.

Online, workers have criticized the bureaucracy’s proclamations of supposedly “historic” gains for senior workers. One commented, “I’m so sick of seeing the ‘average pay’ is 49 an hour, first off that’s 5 years away, and second it’s not everyone.” Another said, “5 years or 4 years it’s all a wage concession. Used to be 90 days to top pay.”

The pay cuts came immediately before the contract representing 340,000 UPS Teamsters was declared to have passed under suspicious circumstances.

The UPS national contract was the result of a conspiracy between UPS, the Teamsters and the Democratic administration of President Joe Biden to prevent a national strike. UPS workers voted overwhelmingly with 97 percent in favor of striking if a contract wasn’t ratified when the previous one expired in July. They demanded \$25 starting pay for part timers, safety and the elimination of the hated hybrid 22.4 warehouse-driver position.

The contract was ratified under dubious circumstances, following a campaign of lies and intimidation by the Teamsters bureaucracy, including a fake “strike ready” campaign designed to frame the sellout as the product of a “credible strike threat.”

To organize opposition to the sellout, workers formed the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee. In the aftermath of the contract’s ratification, the Committee has launched a rank-and-file investigation into the contract, in order to “comprehensively review every element of this process, as well as the contract itself. We will use the testimony of our coworkers, who are being silenced by the union bureaucracy and the company, to show how they violated the will of the rank-and-file as well as our democratic rights.”

We urge all UPS workers to write to the Committee to provide testimony about the violation of their rights up to and following the contract ratification by by emailing upsrangandfilecommittee@gmail.com. No identifying information will be published without your explicit consent.



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