

UPS cuts shifts at major sorting hub in Baltimore, Maryland

Nick Barrickman
4 February 2024

Work at UPS? Tell us if layoffs are taking place where you work. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On Wednesday, United Parcel Service workers at the Arbutus, Maryland hub outside of Baltimore were notified that the company was cutting its entire daytime sort shift as of March 29. According to local press, this would mean the loss of about 118 jobs. The cuts were announced the same day that UPS stated it was laying off over 12,000 non-union corporate employees nationally.

The announcement is part of an ongoing jobs bloodbath which is being unleashed on workers in multiple industries, as corporations introduce forms of automation and technology to reduce the workforce along with the federal government policy of keeping interest rates high in order to attack wages.

According to WBAL, “Employee headcount at UPS had grown with the surge in business to about 540,000. It trimmed that headcount back to about 495,000 by the end of last year.” As a result, “the overall U.S. small package market, excluding Amazon, will grow by less than 1% in 2024.”

Additionally, the publication cites numerous company officials’ statements about wages and compensation. “The company also is dealing with a 12.1% increase in union wage rates, driving its efforts to cut other costs,” it said. WBAL cites UPS CEO Carole Tomé, who in an investors call blamed “the macro environment...as well as higher costs associated with the new contract.”

“There is still work here,” said a worker at the Arbutus hub to the World Socialist Web Site. “[UPS] just wants to send it to new facilities.” Another worker explained that the night sorting shift had been laid off beforehand, leading to 15 jobs being eliminated.

The cuts are being introduced throughout the company’s network. In Portland, Oregon, over 200 positions will be eliminated at the Swan Island facility in April. In Forest Hill, Texas, Teamsters officials at Local 767 notified their members through social media that “layoffs in the package car classification lasting more than 10 days” were being planned.

“They’re either going to move our jobs down to Burtonsville [Maryland] or they’re going to cut the work altogether and do something else,” said one worker at the Baltimore facility, referring to a larger hub closer to Washington, D.C. Other jobs are being shifted to the EZR “super hub” in the suburbs of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, “part of a \$1.4 billion investment by UPS into Pennsylvania,” according to PennLive.

“A lot of work has been going from Baltimore up to Pennsylvania... This building has been here since like the 1950s or the 1960s I believe. This building has never had any upgrades,” a Baltimore worker said. “It’s like they’re just letting the building go down the drain.”

A few workers will be able to follow their jobs to the new locations. As with part-time workers, the majority of full-timers will lose their jobs.

The corporation’s executives have sought to explain the reductions as part of a normal “flexing down” as demand falls. However, UPS is increasingly relying on automation as a way to cut back on paid labor. UPS’s chief financial officer Brian Newman told local press that these cuts were “a change in the way we work” and that “as volume returns to the system, we don’t expect these jobs to come back. It’s changing the effective way that we operate.”

According to a worker at the Baltimore-Arbutus facility, the part-time workforce, which previously

numbered in the “thousands,” had been completely laid off. “Part-timers are already gone,” he said. Another worker called the firings “technically illegal” because part-timers were being fired on the spot and not being given their mandated 14-day notices.

The attack on the part-time workers is especially cynical given the Teamster union officials’ efforts to sell the previous contract, which passed under murky circumstances last summer. The contract was forced down UPS workers’ throats after they were kept on the job after their previous contract expired and they had voted to go on strike.

A Teamsters press release from August declares the contract “historic,” adding that it raises “wages for full and part-time workers, [creates] more full-time jobs,” and won “important workplace protections.” In fact, no sooner was the contract supposedly ratified that the management, with the union’s collusion, began laying off thousands of its workers, replacing them through the introduction of automation and technology.

“The union works for UPS,” said a driver at the hub. “They got us all this money supposedly but then they cut all of our hours, so did we really get more money?”

Over the weekend, Teamster members associated with Local 355 in Baltimore attended a series of informational meetings in which local union representatives sought to deny previous knowledge of the reductions. “People are pissed,” said one worker who attended. He recalled workers complaining that they hadn’t received work in several months because of low volume.

Other than holding meetings, the Teamsters have done little to fight the layoffs. “UPS is going to do what UPS is going to do. The union is going to do what it is going to do,” said one worker.

In order to fight the layoffs, it is necessary for workers to organize themselves for a fight against the company. To do so, organizations based on members from the shop floor and independent of the pro-corporate Teamsters must be built.

On Sunday, the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee held an online event titled “Organize the rank and file to fight the job cuts at UPS! Unite with autoworkers, tech workers and the whole working class against layoffs!”

The purpose of the event was to bring workers together in all industries facing layoffs to build a

network to fight back. The committee’s recent statement declares that the principles of such a movement must be:

- complete control by the rank and file, not the Teamsters bureaucrats.
- rejection of UPS’ alleged ‘right’ to make a profit and the fight for public ownership of UPS and other major corporations.
- unity with workers across the world who are also facing layoffs.”



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact