

Workers discuss global strategy against layoffs at online meeting hosted by UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee

Our reporter
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The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee held an emergency online public meeting Sunday evening, 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 meeting was called in response to last week’s announcement of 12,000 job cuts at UPS. These layoffs affecting managerial and administrative positions are taking place alongside a series of job cuts at the company’s warehouses across the country, as UPS leverages automation and artificial intelligence to replace vast swaths of the workforce.

Many workers attended the call, including UPS workers from across the United States, autoworkers, academic workers and workers from other industries. There was also an important international representation from Britain organized under the auspices of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The meeting emphasized the need for a united struggle of workers across industries and national boundaries against layoffs, which are taking place not just at UPS but in industries around the world. In particular, the auto industry is laying off thousands of workers as it transitions toward electric vehicles. A public meeting last month held by the IWA-RFC against the auto layoffs was also addressed by several members of the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

The opening report was given by WSWs writer Tom Hall. “What has been announced so far is only the beginning,” he warned. “By the end of the year and continuing into the next years, UPS intends to operate with a far smaller workforce which is heavily reliant on emerging new technologies.

“UPS management is leveraging breakthrough technologies in artificial intelligence and automation as its main weapon in this jobs massacre.” These technologies could and should be used to ease the burden of work and improve workers’ standard of living, he said. But under capitalism, they are being “weaponized” in a bid to impoverish workers and “crush the growing wave of strikes and protests” by the working class.

The layoffs expose the contract pushed through last year by Teamsters leaders who sold the contract as a “historic” victory, when in reality it was a colossal sellout. “The bureaucracy is joined at the hip with management and had to have known this was coming when the contract was being voted on,” Hall said. “The

bureaucracy is not simply rolling over. They’re active participants in this conspiracy against workers.”

Mass unemployment is a class policy being directed from the White House, which has been involved in the imposition of every major sellout contract for the past three years, as well as the Federal Reserve and both big business parties, Hall said. “The war at home is connected with the wars abroad. In Ukraine, Gaza and now, over this weekend, new attacks directed against Iran, the US military is launching or supporting dangerous new wars in defense of the profits of US corporations.

“As everyone knows, the resources for endless and escalating war come from the backs of the working class,” he said. “The war on the working class and the wars abroad are two halves of the same war, being carried out in different forms.

“The union bureaucrats are creatures of the state” and support war and dictatorship, Hall warned. He cited the United Auto Workers’ endorsement of “Genocide Joe’s” re-election campaign, as well as the continued courting of Trump by the Teamsters bureaucracy.

“The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee rejects this entire framework,” he concluded. “A counteroffensive can and must be waged by the rank-and-file only to the extent that you break free from the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy. ... You must take matters into your own hands, taking any and all measures you deem necessary, without waiting for permission that will never come.”

Hall ended his remarks by citing the three founding principles proposed in a recent statement by the UPS Rank-and-File Committee to guide a counteroffensive in defense of jobs. This includes “maximum initiative of the rank and file,” rather than a perspective of pressuring the union bureaucracy; the rejection of the “right” of UPS to profit at workers’ expense and the conversion of the giant logistics company and other major corporations into public utilities democratically run by workers themselves; and, finally, the fight for the unity of workers across the globe who are facing the same attacks on jobs.

Hall was followed by a leading member of the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee from Louisville, Kentucky. He spoke in detail about the impact of automation and other new technologies. “The working class is going to get hollowed out in the next 20 years,” he warned. He urged attendees to educate their coworkers

about what is taking place. “It is time for working people to stand up and organize to fight what is coming, because the people that ‘represent’ us, both in government and the union bureaucracy, do not have our backs.”

A member of the committee from New York City said, “Right now, the union is not only stonewalling us, they’re gaslighting us. At my building in mid-Manhattan, they got rid of the midnight sort. Low seniority part-timers already know their time is coming.”

A committee member from South Texas urged attendees to take action. “Reach out to your fellow brothers and sisters, let them know about the rank-and-file committee.” He continued, “This is more than on a local level, this is on a national level, and we all need to come together ... to stand up against the big corporations, to stand up against the billionaires and millionaires.” Let’s “make this rank-and-file committee something bigger than the IBT [International Brotherhood of Teamsters], than the United Auto Workers” bureaucracies, he said.

Several other UPS workers spoke during the meeting. A worker from Portland, Oregon, where UPS announced hundreds of layoffs over the weekend, spoke about the impact the cuts will have on workers at the company’s Swan Island hub. He then denounced the Teamsters’ “roundtable” meeting with Trump late last month, pointing out that this meeting with a coup plotter and fascist was organized with tens of thousands of dollars in workers’ dues money. Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien “seems more concerned with bootlicking fascists than protecting jobs on the shop floor,” he said.

A UPS driver from Kansas City told the meeting he had been laid off more than a dozen times last year. Now, the union is calling a meeting with feeder and package drivers in his area, “which they’ve never done before,” he said. “So, I’m assuming that cuts are coming for us,” he predicted.

A number of significant contributions from autoworkers were made. Anna, a member of the Flint GM Rank-and-File Committee, declared, “We at [GM’s Flint, Michigan Assembly Plant] are in solidarity with UPS workers and with all workers. We are facing the same problems and have the same interests internationally,” she said.

Greg, another member of the GM Flint committee, drew parallels between the campaigns to install Shawn Fain as president of the UAW and Sean O’Brien as president of the Teamsters. Both were “praised by the media, by Bernie Sanders, and by the fake socialists in the [Democratic Socialists of America].” Both of them claimed to have passed contracts that were “historic,” he said, but “the reality is the exact opposite.

“Their treachery extends to the level of the government,” he continued, citing the endorsement of Biden amid the White House’s involvement in the genocide in Gaza. “We don’t support Joe Biden,” he declared. “But Trump’s fascism is just as harmful to us as Biden. We need to oppose both of these parties and fight for our independent interests.”

Greg reviewed the history of the GM committee, which fought against the limited “stand up strike” that was used to present the contract as the product of a fight. “Our rank-and-file committee had warned workers [of the sellout] before it happened ... our strength comes from telling workers the truth beforehand.”

He concluded: “I just want to stress that these companies ... are part of an international system. Workers around the world are facing the same issues. We are being made to pay for the crisis of capitalism. And so I urge everyone to talk to your coworkers like we have at Flint. Expose the truth and build a network of committees under the IWA-RFC.”

Greg’s remarks were echoed by Will Lehman, a socialist Mack Trucks worker who ran against Fain for UAW president in 2022, on a platform of abolishing the bureaucracy. “The unions try to divide us up based on what industry we’re in,” Lehman said, but “the working class is the working class, whether it’s in the US, in the UK, Russia, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen. It doesn’t really matter.

“We need to approach these issues as class issues,” he concluded. “It’s a matter of us uniting with each other, no matter where we are, and no matter what sector we’re in.”

The meeting also received an important report from Tony Robson in Great Britain, on behalf of the UK Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. “These are international issues,” Robson said. “Royal Mail workers here are facing a jobs massacre, due to the sellout of their year-long struggle in 2023.” The Communication Workers Union is “collaborating, just like what’s been described about the Teamsters and the UAW, with huge job losses” affecting “up to 10 percent of the national workforce.” The same government in Britain carrying out these attacks, supported by the Labour Party, is also spending huge amounts of money to back the US in its wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, he said.

Workers everywhere “recognize the need for an independent strategy upon which to fight, and it is this sentiment that the union apparatus wants to crush. A genuine fightback can only be developed as part of a unified struggle internationally,” Robson said.

“The key to unlocking the social power of post or logistics workers,” or in any other industry, “is breaking the grip of this pro-capitalist, nationalist trade union bureaucracy. This is the central principle that we’re advancing with the IWA-RFC,” he said.

In closing remarks to the meeting, Tom Hall stressed that it was only the beginning of joint actions in defense of jobs and against union sellouts by the rank-and-file committees. “But the first step is that you need to make the decision now to become involved ... let’s begin the counter-offensive by the working class,” he concluded.



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