

While layoffs accelerate at UPS, Teamsters bureaucracy makes huge donation to the Republican Party

Tom Hall
23 February 2024

Join the fight against the jobs massacre! Join the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form below.

The jobs massacre is accelerating at UPS, with a new round of layoffs and facility closures around the country.

The company previously announced plans to lay off 12,000 people this year, on top of an ongoing series of shift closures at facilities around the country. The job cuts come only months after the ratification of a UPS contract which the Teamsters falsely portrayed as the best in decades. In fact, it laid the groundwork for the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs.

The layoffs at UPS are part of a global attack on jobs, including in the auto industry, healthcare and the US Postal Service. The aim of these job cuts, being carried out with the aid of automation and other emerging technologies, is to smash the growing resistance of the working class, which has been expressed in a growing number of strikes against poor working conditions and the rising cost of living.

The new layoffs underscore the urgent need for a broad counter-offensive, uniting UPS workers with workers in all industries around the world where jobs are being slashed to prop up profits. This requires a rank-and-file rebellion against the sellout artists in the Teamsters bureaucracy and other trade unions.

The website *Supply Chain Drive* reported on Tuesday that shifts are being eliminated at UPS facilities in Mechanicsville, Virginia, in Maspeth, New York, and in Warwick, Rhode Island. The number of jobs affected in Virginia was not immediately clear, but the website said 130 workers will be affected in Warwick and another 66 in Maspeth, which is located in the New York borough of Queens.

Other layoffs are being reported elsewhere. In Perrysburg, Ohio, UPS is closing a trailer maintenance shop, affecting 38 people. “With the state of the economy, it’s really hard to find a job with benefits to cover a whole family and be able to afford that livable wage,” one worker told local news station WTOL.

UPS is also cutting a sort shift at its hub in New Stanton, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, *triblive.com* reports. The facility is a large hub employing around 1,000 people.

Other cuts are rumored but have not been confirmed by the WSW. On Facebook, one worker from Greensboro, North Carolina wrote: “The rumors are spreading like fire. In less than 2 weeks, a chunk of work is moving to the new hub in Mebane, NC, 45 [minutes] away. I talked to an engineer and was told that this building will undergo some major upgrades to [introduce] automation, eventually running with only 30% of the current staff [and] becoming a small hub for just package cars. Sunrise [shift’s] last day was this past Saturday.”

Regardless, the latest cuts mark a major escalation of what had already been announced, including shift cuts in Louisville, Indianapolis, New York City, Baltimore and Portland. Last week, workers from the Dallas area also reported that the company announced plans for a multi-year closure of its large hub in Mesquite in order to re-tool it as an automated hub.

The number of workers affected nationwide by the shift cuts alone are not immediately known, but almost certainly number in the thousands.

More details were also reported this week in the local press on the layoffs in Portland, Oregon. The company will cut 330 workers at its large Swan Island hub. Those who are Teamster members will retain “bump” rights, meaning they will be able to keep a job by displacing lower-seniority workers on other shifts. Those lower-seniority workers will lose employment at UPS due to a region-wide hiring freeze. According to an internal memo posted to Reddit, workers in Maspeth will not receive bump rights, meaning the affected workers will lose their jobs.

UPS’ cost-cutting strategy: automation, consolidation

UPS is in the midst of a massive restructuring program, aimed at cutting tens of thousands of jobs through automation and through the consolidation of its network into a smaller number of high-tech hubs.

A source within the company’s Human Resources department described methods being used in the following terms:

You have no idea what’s about to come. The list won’t be a location here and there, it’ll be every single state and several buildings.

Essentially, the directive that the [HR] team has is to look at any UPS Facility within a 75-100 mile radius of another UPS facility, and consolidate them into one automated building.

Before, we had several Hubs and then “package centers” where the iconic Brown Trucks lived. These Centers would be in nearly every small town, which made sense. But, as always, the “pursuit of shareholder value” took priority and now, all of these small Centers are being closed and moved to an automated building, or at least a large conventional.

But that means a Brown Truck might be driving 80 miles before its first delivery! But, right now, it seems to be all about the instant cost savings.

Job cuts will likely speed up considerably in the coming weeks. “There is a big annual meeting in the first week of March in Atlanta, where all Directors from across the country fly in,” the source said. “After that meeting, we usually get our marching orders for the year.”

The consolidation of the company’s network into a handful of automated hubs has the potential to eliminate the vast majority of UPS warehouse workers, who make up a majority of the 340,000 Teamsters members at the company. These workers are almost all part-time and heavily exploited, due to decades of cuts to real wages enforced by the Teamsters. The new contract increases starting pay to \$21 per hour for part-time workers who remain. This is still far below what part-timers made, in real terms, in the late 1970s.

A video released last year of UPS’ new Velocity Hub in the Louisville area gives a sense of what the company envisions in the near future for workers. The video shows huge lines of robots moving packages around the floor, with only a handful of workers—the facility employs only 200 people but 3,000 robots.

According to a team leader, 80 percent of the workforce speaks only Spanish. In other words, UPS hopes to super-exploit immigrant labor who are being subjected to fresh attacks by Republican politicians, whose policies the Democrats are adopting in an attempt to secure funding for the war in Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The job cuts are not only having a devastating impact on rank-and-file workers, but also on part-time supervisors and other lower-level management and administrative personnel. One part-time supervisor wrote to the WSWs: “I have never worked less than 40 hours a week in my time with the company ... [but] as of 2 weeks ago, we have all been cut to 25 hours a week. No exceptions. Needless to say this will be a financial burden on my family. We also have union workers who are also being affected as well.

“Considering the 12,000 lay-offs, I am grateful to still be employed, but knowing the company’s reputation, I’m sure this too can change for some or ALL of us at any time without notice. ... It is very disheartening to know that in the years that I have been with UPS that I am only considered as a name and number on paper with an attached negative dollar sign. I may possibly lose my job and career based on an unfair and unbalanced contract.”

Silence from Teamsters, while the rank-and-file organizes in opposition

The Teamsters bureaucracy continues to maintain a guilty silence, months after the layoffs began. The union, including General President Sean O’Brien, still has failed to even acknowledged any of the layoffs are taking place, despite their being widely reported in local and national news outlets. This is because to acknowledge the cuts would be to admit that the claims they used to force through last year’s contract were a pack of lies.

On its official Twitter/X account, the Teamsters union has highlighted a series of empty PR appearances by O’Brien and other top officials at UPS facilities in the northeastern US, in which the

layoffs were not mentioned. Instead, they are attempting to divert workers’ attention into an empty “contract enforcement” campaign.

“Rank-and-file Teamsters nationwide and union leadership are executing an intense UPS contract enforcement campaign to educate and equip members with all the resources at their disposal to ensure UPS abides by the record contract negotiated and ratified last year,” one post claimed. In reality, workers have told the WSWs that Teamsters officials are not telling them anything. At any rate, references to “enforcement” are a red herring because nothing in the contract prevents the layoffs from taking place.

Meanwhile, rank-and-file workers are organizing against both UPS and their agents in the union bureaucracy. The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee has issued a powerful statement against the layoffs, warning workers about what is taking place and calling for a broad “counter-campaign” by the rank-and-file independent of the apparatus. The Committee also held a successful online meeting earlier this month, which also took reports from representatives from rank-and-file committees in the auto industry and from Britain, where Royal Mail workers are also fighting against mass layoffs with the collusion of the postal union.

While the Teamsters bureaucracy ignores the jobs bloodbath, they continue their active courting of Donald Trump and the far-right, following a roundtable with the former president and would-be dictator last month. The *Washington Post* this week reported that the Teamsters had sent a \$45,000 donation to the Republican National Committee. The newspaper, owned by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, presented the move as unusual given that the Biden administration supposedly “championed workers rights.”

This is absurd. Biden, who banned a rail strike in late 2022, is working with the bureaucracy to enforce sellout contracts and impose labor discipline as his administration barrels towards World War III. The Teamsters’ courting of the fascist Trump not only expresses the extreme-right sympathies of Biden’s allies in the union bureaucracy, but the logical outcome of his own corporatist policies.

The Teamsters bureaucrats’ counterparts in the United Auto Workers, meanwhile, combine a silence on mass firings and layoffs with an endorsement for “Genocide Joe” Biden, who gave a militaristic acceptance speech declaring American workers had to build “tanks and aircraft carriers” while the bureaucrats dragged out antiwar protesters from their rally.

What is common to both wings of the union bureaucracy is their ever-greater incorporation into the capitalist state, regardless of who is in the White House, and their hostility to the political independence of working class, which they direct all of their energy towards preventing. Workers must organize a fight against the authority and control of the union apparatus as a critical component of the fight against job losses and against war.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact