

“You’re just scared. Are you going to be on the street? Are you going to be without a phone? Are you going to be in debt?”

UPS part-timer in New York City speaks out against mass layoffs

Elliott Murtagh
12 March 2024

Speak out against the jobs bloodbath at UPS! Send your statement by filling out the form below. All submissions will remain anonymous.

A worker at UPS’s 43rd Street hub in New York City spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the mass layoffs at the logistics firm. Months after the Teamsters union pushed through what they falsely claimed to be one of the richest contracts in company history, UPS has announced plans to lay off more than 12,000 people. At warehouses nationwide, shifts are being cut and entire facilities being replaced by new automated hubs requiring a fraction of the labor.

The 43rd Street hub operates 24 hour hours a day on four shifts. Evan, whose name has been changed for the purpose of anonymity, has worked at UPS for three years as a part-time worker. The interview has been edited for clarity and length. Evan was laid off from the Midnight shift and transferred to the Pre-load morning shift, which starts at 4AM and goes to 8 or 9AM.

WSWS: *How many workers were affected by the layoffs in your building?*

Evan: My understanding is the whole building laid off about 78 people. It was the whole midnight shift—40 [part-time] workers—but also Twilight and Pre-load got hit with layoffs as well, so 78 total. A lot of people are mad about it.

The first wave started right after the new year. That was a big surprise. A supervisor told us, ‘Listen, they’re gonna start laying off people.’ The reason given was that volume is getting short. A second wave of layoffs occurred shortly after and I heard there’s another one coming up.

Some workers without seniority were laid off completely. Anyone who had less years, they [UPS] didn’t really take them.

They’re also bringing 40 full-timers from different [UPS] buildings to over here this week and dividing them up between the shifts. I’m very worried.

WSWS: *You mentioned earlier that many part-time Midnight workers who were laid off also had jobs during the day. What happened to them?*

Evan: Yes, most people had two jobs so they couldn’t continue with the different shifts. So I could say out of the 78, there was like 13 people that actually were able to make it and be called in for a floor spot.

They can’t fire us, but they told us that if you don’t like it, quit. If you quit, they love that because that’s basically what they want you to do. They want to force you to quit. And you can’t collect unemployment because technically you’re not fired.

One co-worker, who worked at UPS for one and a half years, got laid off for three months. They moved him to Pre-load and told him to come back in three months and that he’s on call for one or two or three days a week. They just want him to quit.

WSWS: *What has been the response of the union, including Teamsters local 804, to these layoffs?*

Evan: So far, no one has spoken to me about it. They [the Teamsters] just say at least you got a job. The problem is they just stay quiet.

One union guy called me to ask if I got switched to Pre-load and I asked him, “Do you know what the hell is going on with the layoffs?” And he’s like, “What UPS is doing right now is wrong,” but that’s all that the union guy told me.

WSWS: *So the Teamsters are just accepting it and not putting up a fight.*

Evan: Yeah, of course. And that’s what a lot of people are saying and I believe it. The union guys never came up to us telling us that we were going to get laid off.

They’re not even helping us. They’re not fighting, they’re doing nothing.

WSWS: *And these layoffs follow the Teamsters-UPS contract last year, which Sean O’Brien hailed as a “historic contract.”*

Evan: I bet Sean O’Brien was just saying that because he knew what the CEO was planning. He probably got a good cut out of it so he kept his mouth shut.

WSWS: *We’ve been covering the current wave of layoffs this year at UPS and more broadly, along with the rise in automation. What do you make of these developments?*

Evan: I knew one day automation would come, but I was surprised it came so soon. I saw a YouTube video on the automation [at UPS] and how it works. The second floor is sorting and they have no-one—one or two people. The first floor is to load and unload the truck, but once they find automation to load and unload the truck, that's when we all lose [our jobs]. People say drivers are safe, but no, they got laid off as well.

Midnight [shift] used to run about 54 trailers, which would be approximately 70 or 100,000 packages per night. And during this past peak season, from September to January, that's when we noticed it was kind of low, about 25 trucks.

That was when they opened the brand new hub [in Bayonne, New Jersey] and started taking our trailers. We noticed we were losing more trailers. We had to start taking other trailers from other shifts so that we had work to do. All that work was going to automation. Everyone at UPS knows it's because of that.

In New York City, they already closed one building due to low volume. But it's not because of the layoffs, but because the volume went to a different location. Like Uline, for example. Uline was the number one truck that would come in that we would have to unload, but they've announced that we're not going to get Uline anymore. It got transferred to New Jersey. They're doing it now. And then they started taking more trucks.

WSWS: *What is it like being a part-time worker at UPS in New York City, one of the most expensive cities on the planet?*

Evan: Part-timers are entitled to three and a half hours a day, just like full timers are entitled to eight hours a day. But we're having less trucks, like 11 trucks a night, which is not enough for the whole building. So we have to deal with trying to actually work the day and not get sent home early or told not to come in at all. They're actually not letting most of us do our three and a half. We have to argue with management to see if we can stay for all of three and a half.

But this job doesn't pay for rent, doesn't pay for anything, because you can't live off \$310 a week in New York City. That's just pocket money or paying your cell phone bill or stuff like that. In other words, you need a second job.

I'm lucky because I live with family members and this part-time job just helps them out. If it was me actually living on my own, that job is not gonna cut enough to even live.

Not being able to finish your week with at least a good amount of hours put in, at one point you're just scared. Are you going to be on the street? Are you going to be without a phone? Are you going to be in debt? That's all the things that goes through people's head and everybody at UPS is scared of.

At this point, we notice drivers being scared. When I saw the drivers being scared that's when I realized that this is actually really big for them to be scared.

Another point is that if a UPS building closes down, the full-timers have the privilege to get transferred to another building, but part-timers lose their job permanently.

WSWS: *Have you tried getting rolled over to full time?*

I've tried to go full time since the moment I started working. I wanted to build a career. But it's BS for part-timers. There's no way you can actually go to full time because you need to make these hours [which workers aren't given].

They said there was going to be new full-time positions available with the new contract. Well, I didn't see that.

We got paid \$21 on Midnight [shift]. Right now on Pre-load we're getting \$22. The only good thing is that I got a \$1 raise more. They say, "Oh, you got a raise!" But they'll lay you off now...

Full time was my dream, but ever since a lot of this [automation and layoff] stuff started, they don't even care if you want to go full time.

WSWS: *These permanent part-time jobs, of course, are not limited to UPS or the logistics industry, but have been implemented by corporations to exploit a cheap and temporary workforce, as well as pit part-time and full-time workers against each other.*

Another point to emphasize is that the current wave of layoffs across many different industries is taking place in the context of the beginning stages of World War. The US ruling class, both Democrats and Republicans, are waging and funding wars abroad in Ukraine, in Gaza and the Middle East and against China. What do you make of this, where billions of dollars are going towards war while workers in the US are struggling to find a job?

Evan: It is affecting us a lot because they're paying billions in war instead of us.

If layoffs are happening all over other companies, like Amazon, who knows, are we going to go through another Great Depression? There's a lot of people that are actually losing their jobs.

Ever since I got laid off, I've been applying for another job, but they don't want to take anybody. There's no open available spots. Those laid off where I work, they're all trying to look for a job as well and that makes it hard for all of us. Too many people are trying to apply at the same time.

I think that has to do a lot with the US not helping us either. Instead of paying billions in war.

WSWS: *The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is fighting to independently organize workers at UPS and throughout the logistics industry to unify and take up a struggle against these layoffs, fighting for what workers actually need, not what the multi-billion dollar companies say they can afford. Anything you'd like to add on this point?*

Evan: I hope this information helps other people see what's happening at UPS and that they join the committee.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact