

UPS lays off night shift at New York City hub, as nationwide job cuts continue

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UPS will eliminate the night shift at its large 43rd Street hub in New York City, the company announced Monday. The layoffs are scheduled to take place on June 21.

This is only the latest in a massive attack on jobs at UPS, which has announced more than 12,000 layoffs so far this year. The company falsely claims the 43rd Street cuts are due to “volume loss in the network.” In reality, they are bound up with a massive restructuring, as the company seeks to eliminate huge portions of its workforce by consolidating its network into a smaller number of hi-tech hubs using the latest in automation and artificial intelligence.

Around the world, in virtually every industry, the ruling class is using emerging technology to slash jobs and smash the growing opposition in the working class, expressed in the growing number of strikes and protests. In the United States, layoffs last month reached their highest level year-on-year since the Great Recession in 2009.

Few part-time workers remain working at the 43rd Street hub. Almost all have been laid off or “bumped” from the midnight and night shifts by higher seniority workers who lost their previous positions.

A part-time 43rd Street worker wrote to the WSWS last week to describe the situation. “It’s bad. I got laid off from [the midnight shift], got put in preload, and now they said they are getting rid of more people. They are bringing in people ... roughly 40 full-time workers to [bump] all part timers and some low-seniority full time. They never cared about us, the union doesn’t wanna help us. It is all because of the automated hubs. It is all BS that the volume is low. They had planned this from the start.”

A UPS driver at 43rd Street said, “They are starting layoffs of drivers. Soon we will find out how low the seniority cutoff is, and why the union is not letting the guys know ahead of time. This is the company reducing their labor because they want to not pay as much out and

save money. I heard one manager said upper management wants heads to roll.”

The accelerating mass layoffs follow last year’s contract, which the Teamsters union falsely portrayed as “historic,” while concealing plans for mass job cuts. Now, the bureaucracy has stood back and allowed these jobs to be destroyed. The Teamsters’ national officials held their first and only online meeting to address the layoffs earlier this month, in a “town hall” which lasted only nine minutes.

UPS workers are organizing to fight the management-union bureaucrat conspiracy through the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee. In a statement published at the beginning of the year, the committee explained:

The central demand of the rank-and-file movement must be that not a single job be lost due to automation. We are not against new technology, which could and should be used to make our lives easier instead of throwing us out on the street. Instead of losing our jobs, the huge efficiencies promised by automation should be used to reduce the length of our work schedule, while *increasing* our total take-home pay.

The Committee called for the formation of a “counter-campaign” against the job cuts based on three basic principles, 1) total control by the rank and file, 2) the rejection of UPS’ “right” to a profit, and 3) the unity of UPS workers with logistics and other workers across the US and around the world.

At the 43rd Street hub, workers spoke to the WSWS about the mass layoffs. One driver explained, “The layoff of drivers has never been discussed with us. One day to the next, our co-workers are being laid off. I heard they

had a little 10-minute union meeting at 10 a.m. on Monday morning. I would have liked to have been there to ask what they had to say. But I didn't go because I had to be on the road. No driver would stay for that because we all have to be on the road by then.

"I know the 22.3 Combo Helpers are not helping us on the trucks any more. They are shift workers only now. This morning, I heard a call for all drivers to come in because we don't have any replacements."

Another driver said, "I heard someone mention that there was going to be an announcement of driver layoffs, but that is all I heard."

A driver with 15 years said, "I was pretty lucky because when I started, I was put on full-time pretty fast. It's not like that now. I'm not too worried about losing my job, but I heard about the layoffs of part-timers. I hope things work out for the others and that they get put on full-time."

A driver who has spoken to the campaigners before described his situation. "They have changed the Twilight shift so there are people working there. But they are working split shifts.

"They have taken the Combo Helpers off the road. The guy who used to help me is now inside. They can't help us now. I do a lot of work. I deliver 600, 700 or 800 packages in a day, and I have delivered 14,000 in a day. I delivered 654 today. I haven't heard anything about Sunday announcement of driver layoffs."

One driver told the campaigners, "I have [over 15] years at UPS. My goal is to make it to 25 years. It all depends how well my body holds up. We used to have to deliver fairly light loads, and if we had heavier packages to deliver, they sent a helper. They don't do that anymore, so there are times when I'm delivering packages between 115 to 120 pounds all by myself."

Another driver placed responsibility for the cuts on the Teamsters bureaucracy. "The union executive board just gave themselves a raise of about \$10,000 a year, and they've given themselves a three-day weekend every week by declaring they will be not be open on Friday. Anything you ask or anything you tell them about, they tell you to check the website. Now you have to ask them and make a request on the website to get a copy of the contract which they always gave all of us copies right away in the past. The corruption of the union is rampant, and I tell them this to their faces.

"We see layoffs every day, and the union does nothing. We need lawyers," he concluded. When it was suggested that UPS workers needed to build the UPS Rank-and-File Committee with more rank-and-file workers, he said,

"That is the kind of organization I could get into."

Referring back to the layoffs he commented, "There are so many things corporations are using to replace workers. They are using many things and ways to get rid of workers. These are the things we see every day. But every time you say something about it to the union, they look at you like you are the troublemaker."

When asked his thoughts about the presidential election, he replied: "I am for a socialist candidate for president." When asked why, he explained from a certain international perspective, "We need someone who is not related to the ruling families. They don't owe anything to anybody, and they won't start taking orders from them when they are elected. We are supposed to live in a democracy in this country, but the choices are very limited."

The wider political context was introduced by the campaigners. One driver said, "I don't like either of the two major party candidates in the presidential election. I have been a longtime Democrat, but not now. I hope there is a third party like the Green Party or something now that looks out for the little man. No one looks out for the middle class or the working class who keep this country going. And yes, I am for a sliding scale of hours and wages to keep everyone working."

Another driver getting off work agreed with the idea of building a socialist leadership in the working class and the power the working class has, "Yeah, we have the numbers, we're the blood that makes the system run," he said.

A third, when asked about the "choice" between Biden and Trump, said, "you don't have to tell me about it, I'm Palestinian, so I'm fully aware of what Biden is doing, and O'Brien gave Trump \$45,000, but guess what? Biden 100 percent hates the union rank-and-file too."



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