

Fight the UPS job cuts: For workers' control over production and new technologies!

The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee
4 April 2024

The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an emergency online meeting this Sunday, April 7, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time: "Organize the rank and file to fight the job cuts at UPS! Unite with autoworkers, tech workers and the whole working class against layoffs!" Register for the meeting here.

The following statement was adopted by the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded last year to oppose the sellout contract pushed by the Teamsters bureaucracy. To contact the Committee, email upsrankandfilecommittee@gmail.com or fill out the form at the bottom of this page.

UPS' announcement that it is planning to close over 200 facilities is the start of the next stage of the company's attack on the working class.

Tens of thousands of jobs will be destroyed if these plans go through. In comments to the press, UPS CEO Carol Tomé said that the company is aiming to automate "everything." Technology which is already being introduced can potentially be used to eliminate four out of every five jobs inside warehouses.

The company couldn't do this without the support of the Teamsters bureaucracy. Last year, they pushed through a contract that they said was the best in generations. Now, there is no question that it is the biggest sellout in generations. Tomé herself has boasted that the contract dramatically reduces cost growth after its first year, and has cited "labor certainty" as a key factor in rolling out the new "Network of the Future" job-cutting campaign. Tomé is not just speaking for herself: all of UPS' top executives have praised the contract as being good for the bottom line of the company's shareholders.

This is why General President Sean O'Brien and the rest of the bureaucracy have stayed silent since the first layoffs were announced months ago. It's not just that they are refusing to defend us. They are key allies in the attacks on our jobs. Meanwhile, they are quietly going after everyone who raises any criticism of the contract, including the administrators of the Teamsterlink messageboard and even union Vice President John Palmer.

The same thing is taking place in other industries. The United Auto Workers, following the mold set by the Teamsters, also pushed through a "historic" contract which is now being used

to cut thousands of auto jobs. In the US Postal Service, the "Delivering for America" restructuring program will lead to tens of thousands of fewer jobs and the closure of thousands of local post offices. Across different industries, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been axed since the start of last year.

What the ruling elite are trying to create through these sellouts is an unrestrained dictatorship of management in the workplace. They see this as particularly crucial as the US government transitions towards a war economy against Russia, China and Iran.

Automation is being used by the corporations as a weapon against the working class. These are labor saving technologies which could and should make our lives easier. Instead, they're being used to squeeze the maximum production and profit out of workers and throw the rest of us in the streets.

They're doing this because they are terrified of the growing wave of strikes and protests in the US and worldwide. We have refused to accept record inflation, longer hours and worse working conditions. They want to use mass unemployment to try to smash our resistance.

The latest wave of closures confirms the warnings the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee made in January. "This is not something coming down the pike," we said. "It is here, it is happening now, and we have to organize ourselves now to fight it."

In that statement, we proposed that the rank-and-file launch a counteroffensive in defense of jobs. That call is now more urgent than ever. We proposed that it be based on three basic principles. Those are:

First, the maximum initiative must remain in the hands of rank-and-file workers. We must not be chained to a perspective of pressuring this or that union bureaucrat or waiting on the outcome of backroom talks. We insist we have the right and the duty to take all actions which we deem necessary to defend our jobs, regardless of whether the bureaucracy sanctions them or not. If they refuse to do so, they only further expose themselves as pro-company stooges.

Second, we must reject the "right" of UPS and other

corporations to a profit at our expense. Everyone knows there is enough money to secure good-paying jobs. In 2022, UPS made \$13 billion in profit off the \$100 billion in revenue created by our labor. The problem is not a lack of money but the domination of the logistics and delivery networks at the heart of the modern economy by massive corporations run by super-wealthy oligarchs. Their domination over society must be ended if we are to make any headway in defense of jobs and living standards. This requires the public ownership of UPS and other huge corporations, run democratically by workers themselves as public utilities.

Third, we must unite with workers in logistics and other industries around the US and the world. Everywhere the policies of the major multinational corporations are the same: endless job and wage cuts to pay for profits, and for wars in defense of profits. We must meet their global strategy with a global movement uniting workers across all countries in defense of our common interests.

A rank-and-file rebellion against not just management, but the union bureaucracy, is the only thing that can stop this. As long as the Teamsters sellout artists remain in charge, UPS will succeed in its drive to cut jobs. But if we break out of their control, and develop new, alternative structures, that will change the balance of power in our favor.

The fight to defend jobs requires that we take stock of the new technologies. It is one thing to oppose the job cuts. But automation is here, it is developing quickly, and it isn't going away. Basing ourselves on a strategy that tries to sidestep the issue of automation, or simply rejects it in favor of continuing to work as we always have, is not realistic.

This is why a central aim must be workers' control over production and the new technology, so that it can be used for the benefit of all, not squandered on share buybacks and dividends.

Instead, we call for the greater efficiency promised by automation to be used for the following:

- A reduction in working hours with no loss in take-home pay or benefits. In fact, the size of our paychecks should be increased, with full protection for inflation.
- The hiring of thousands of part-time workers to full-time positions, especially as delivery drivers, who have been suffering under massive overwork.
- Investment in air conditioning for delivery trucks and warehouses, as well as other basic health and safety measures
- A reduction in the retirement age, and the full funding of pensions and healthcare.

These demands are obviously impossible if management controls the new technology and what it is used for. Matters are not solved through joint Teamsters-management technology

committees, which just make the union jointly responsible for imposing job cuts. The outlook of the Teamsters officials was summed up when one member of the bargaining team declared that the company "has the right" to carry out mass layoffs.

This is why the only viable solution is rank-and-file control over the new technology. Rank-and-file committees at a local and national level, composed exclusively of trusted shop floor workers with no connection to the bureaucracy, must oversee the implementation of automation to meet our needs. The whole process should be as transparent as possible, and subject to collective approval by the entire workforce.

A dual power must be established in the workplace, where these committees oversee every aspect of operations, including production, health and safety. Against the bogus "right" of UPS to do whatever they want, which the Teamsters overseers uphold as holy writ, we must impose our will to protect jobs and our livelihoods.

No doubt UPS would object that our demands are "unaffordable" and that implementing them would only defeat the purpose of the new tech, which is to reduce their costs and increase profits.

But the bottom line can't be decided by the interests of the handful of oligarchs and Wall Street firms that own UPS and other major corporations. If they are incapable of using the latest developments to improve our lives, but only to worsen them in order to enrich themselves, then they have no right to control these pillars of the economy.

This is why we should raise as a special demand the transfer of UPS and other major corporations to public ownership, under the democratic control of the working class. What we face is not a "contract issue," and there is no "middle ground" between our interests and those of the ruling elite around which reasonable minds will prevail. Either our interests prevail, or those of the capitalist oligarchy. There is no in-between.

This requires that our fight be part of a broad-based movement in the working class against inequality and the profit system. We must unite with our brothers and sisters in the auto industry, the post office, in healthcare and other industries where jobs are under attack in a common struggle based on the interests of the working class. These interests are global—we must unite with workers all over the world, where the same attacks by the same huge corporations are taking place.

If you agree with this, then make the decision to become involved today. Join the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing upsrankandfilecommittee@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form below.



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