

UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee hosts meeting to organize opposition to mass layoffs

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8 April 2024

Join the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee to fight against the closures! Email upsrankandfilecommittee@gmail.com, or fill out the form below.

On Sunday, the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee held a well-attended public online meeting to discuss and organize against the ongoing, and mounting layoffs at the logistics giant. Roughly 100 workers from across the United States and Canada attended the meeting.

Seven months after the Teamsters pushed through a sellout contract, UPS executives at the behest of Wall Street are embarking on a massive wave of shift and building closures. After laying off 12,000 corporate and managerial positions earlier this year, UPS executives at a recent investor meeting in Louisville, Kentucky announced they will be closing at least 200 facilities across the country. In multiple interviews, UPS CEO Carol Tomé has pledged to automate “everything,” which, in her words means, “we don’t need as many people to move the packages in the buildings that we have today.” Tomé promised that by the end of the initial phase of the new “Network of the Future,” 400 buildings would be “fully automated.”

These layoffs, made possible by the sellout contract sold by the Teamsters as a “historic” victory, are part of a corporate initiative in every industry to replace as many workers as possible with automation and artificial intelligence technologies. These tools, which could be used to improve the lives of workers by reducing working hours and increasing pay, are instead being used to attack the working class and boost profits.

Instead of opposing this threat to tens of thousands of jobs at one of the United States’ largest employers, the Teamsters bureaucracy is colluding with management to enforce layoffs. Teamsters president Sean O’Brien, who has found the time to hobnob with Trump and Biden, has yet to issue a statement, much less a program for fighting

against the layoffs. Instead of doing everything in their power to protect workers’ jobs, the Teamsters are working with the company to impose the coming jobs bloodbath. During a local Teamsters meeting, Business Agent Ben Vedus, who was on the UPS bargaining committee, claimed that the company had a “right to do what it is doing.”

Such exchanges expose the Teamsters bureaucracy as an agent of the companies and underscores the urgent need for workers to organize their own independent struggle against the joint Teamsters-UPS conspiracy.

This was the purpose of Sunday’s meeting which began with a report from *World Socialist Web Site* writer Tom Hall who explained that the new technologies could be used to reduce working hours with no loss in take-home pay. Further, these advances could be used to fully fund pensions and healthcare while lowering the retirement age. He continued, “Part-timers freed from work inside the warehouses could be hired in as full-time drivers to relieve a massive overwork which drivers face on a daily basis. Investments in safety such as air conditioning in vehicles and warehouses could also be funded out of the savings. All of this is possible, but only if the working class controls how the technology is used.”

Hall added, “A dual power must be established in the workplace where these committees oversee every aspect of operations including production, health and safety. Everything depends upon the independent initiative of the rank and file. If matters are left in the hands of the Teamsters bureaucracy, that means leaving matters in the hands of UPS management. The bureaucracy cannot be reformed, it can only be thrown out and replaced with new organizations which workers actually control.”

Several UPS workers on the call agreed with this perspective. Mike, a UPS worker from Texas, said, “I would highly suggest to organize your brothers and sisters. They’re going to stand together, keep everybody

informed, and don't believe the lies that have been told to you by the bureaucracy."

"Everybody needs to make a living," Mike concluded. "Everybody has families to feed. Protect your brothers and sisters and help spread the word about the Rank-and-File Committee."

Daniel, a postal worker in Canada, expressed solidarity with UPS workers: "The union has proven time and again that they do not represent us. Any fight against concessions must raise the necessity of a political struggle against the tripartite corporate-union-government alliance, which works to further capitalist interests, including austerity for the working class, tax cuts for the ruling class and increased military spending to wage war abroad. We need to adopt a political perspective of organizing society based on the public social interest and, as many workers have brought up, we cannot confine our struggles to defending capitalism or any corporation's private profit framework."

Every worker who spoke on the call was outraged by the betrayals of the Teamsters union. One worker said "I don't understand why we pay union dues and nobody's informing us of any of this. The only thing that's going to be open in my hub for a human would be unloading and loading. They're even automating the sort, what I do. And we have so many drivers and feeders drivers that were just laid off just out of nowhere. They laid off a pregnant woman. She's about to give birth. She has no medical. She's just thrown to the wolves there."

Another added, "The Teamsters have explicitly agreed to the right of UPS to lay off people virtually without any meaningful restrictions using new technologies and changes to their business model. The only requirement contractually is that the company has to give the Teamsters a 45-day advanced notice that the layoffs are coming. And as long as that requirement is satisfied, that's it. They can carry out the layoffs."

Will Lehman, a socialist auto worker, spoke on the role of the trade unions and the government in supporting the company's attacks on jobs: "The government is beholden to the corporations. That's why every case that the workers come up against fighting the corporations, the government is the ultimate decider of it. They're going to defend the right of private profit, meaning the company's profits over your jobs, our jobs, and they're going to defend the interests of the company and laying off workers."

Socialist Equality Party candidate for president, Joseph Kishore, expanded on these points and expressed the

central political issues facing workers.

"There is no capitalism without exploitation. Exploitation is at the core of capitalism. That is the exploitation of the vast majority of the working class for the benefit of the owners.

"You have an election now in which you have two parties that represent the interests of the employers. That's the fact. Politics is a reflection of society. The owners own production and they own the politicians.

"There's a lot of misinformation about what socialism is. What socialism really is, is a society run by the workers, for the workers, in the interests of the working class, in which exploitation is ended, capitalism is ended, class society is abolished, in which the process of production is controlled democratically for social need, so that advances in technology will serve the interests of the working class and society as a whole, rather than the corporate and financial elite."

The meeting ended with a call from Tom Hall for workers to build the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee and organize the working class to fight back against the corporate assault on jobs.

"If there is going to be a fight back, you have to become involved. Nothing will happen on its own. And you can't leave this to other people to wage a fight. This requires the broadest possible mobilization of the entire membership at UPS. And in fact, workers across the United States and around the world. So if you agree with what has been said here today, you must make the decision to join the committee."

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