

UPS to close down Portland facility next summer, as workers condemn mass layoffs enabled by Teamsters union

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UPS workers: Speak out against the automation-led layoffs and the sellout contract! Fill out the form below; all submissions will be kept anonymous.

Across the United States, current and former UPS workers are speaking out against ongoing layoffs that are leaving thousands of workers jobless. In just the last month alone UPS has announced major layoffs at facilities in Commerce City, Colorado; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Los Angeles, California, affecting more than 1,000 workers.

The layoffs are part of the “Network of the Future,” an ongoing process initiated by UPS management to eliminate tens of thousands of jobs as part of a modernization operation. Executives, at the behest of Wall Street, are aiming to close and remodel 200 facilities across the country in order to introduce automation and artificial intelligence technologies to eliminate labor costs for the company.

On Thursday afternoon, a source confirmed with the WSWs that UPS plans to close down its large Swan Island hub in Portland, Oregon, next summer. The facility is one of the largest in the region but has been decimated by shift cuts in the recent period.

Numerous sources inside the plant have confirmed to workers that the facility will be converted into an automated hub following its closure. Once reopened, it will employ a fraction of the workforce; already existing technology, which the company is implementing, has the potential to eliminate 80 percent of warehouse jobs.

Last year, the Teamsters union deliberately concealed these plans in order to secure passage of a contract they falsely claimed was “historic.” Since then, the bureaucracy has kept a near-total silence on the cuts. The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed during the contract struggle, warned workers early this year the cuts were underway. In April, it issued an open letter to General President Sean O’Brien “demanding answers” about the layoffs which he has not answered.

Several current and former UPS workers in Southern California expressed outrage that nothing is being done by the Teamsters to fight to protect workers’ jobs in the face of

layoffs. Furthermore, anger is growing over the so-called “historic” contract forced through by the Teamsters last year which prevented a joint strike between UPS workers and tens of thousands of actors and writers, who were on strike at the same time fighting for the same protections against artificial intelligence and automation.

Hugo, a driver for UPS for 33 years, told the WSWs that a “lot of members are pissed at Sean O’Brien.

“All this talk about a ‘historic’ contract ... maybe it was ‘historic’ for UPS but not for the members. There is no protection against AI or automation.”

Hugo recalled being at a rally last year that featured O’Brien and the Teamsters bureaucracy held at the Olympia facility in Los Angeles with SAG-AFTRA and WGA members. “O’Brien knew damn well then, because the actors were raising it too. SAG-AFTRA, their main concern, a major focus of their contract, was AI. O’Brien knew we had to have protections too, but he did nothing.”

The veteran driver recalled that in the lead-up to the expiration of the contract, the union did nothing to address workers’ demands.

“They ignore you. If you wanted to go ahead and have anything constructive added on to the contract, they would just go ahead and not give you the time of day. They had a survey card that they passed around for people to go ahead and list their top five priorities that you want them to discuss in the contract.

“But the choices, they give you, they are outlined on that card. As far as you selecting AI, or having a box that’s labeled like ‘Other’ for you to go ahead and have a write-in option, no, there is nothing like that.”

Hugo noted that the “democracy” within the trade union was a “micro example of what happens in, you know, national politics.” He said the “unions operate in the same manner. They try to go ahead and keep the membership dumbed down and ignorant. They do not want to give them much information. They do the bare minimum that the [National Labor Relations Board] requires of them.

“Members pay union dues, but they don’t have a voice,” he added.

Hugo also noted that the five-year contract forced through last year only included a 25 cent increase to pension contributions for West Coast Teamsters members in the first year. “There is no new money in pension contributions for the second, third, fourth or fifth years. Considering all the billions in revenue that UPS makes, there is no reason we could not have had an increase to our pension contributions every year of the contract,” he said.

Vivian, a recently hired worker at the Grande Vista facility in Los Angeles told the WSWs the coming layoffs were “unfair for the people have been working here so long.”

She is trying to avoid being laid off herself saying she “does everything. ... I get less than 30 hours a week. The benefits are supposed to kick in after 9 months. You’re supposed to get medical, dental, vision and even life insurance. That’s if you pass 9 months.”

Jesus, a 25-year worker at the same facility, told the WSWs, “Whoever has been here five years or less, they are high risk. But I know it is not our fault. I don’t agree with the layoffs, but the company is not for the people. So hopefully it won’t affect me because I’ve been here too long.”

He said it is “so busy because of the shopping season. We have three shifts: it’s twilight, night and they still have one in the morning. Last year they were letting the people in the morning go and help us. That’s doing double shifts so that’s extra pay. But this year they are not letting anyone do doubles, and they hire a lot of people doing temporary jobs. So that’s the way they save money. And you know the benefits don’t kick in for 9 months. A lot of people got hired a month ago. They’re not going to get the benefits.

“I worry about the younger generation. It’s impossible to get a good job and have a future.”

For many part-timers, who make around \$21 an hour, the goal is to eventually become a driver. But Hugo noted even for drivers “earning pretty good money, \$80,000 to \$100,000, \$120,000, and they still can’t afford to buy a home. It’s just impossible for them to go ahead and come up with the down payment and then to make the mortgage and then put food on the table and gas and all the expenses, send your kids to school, feed your kids. I mean, yeah, it takes a lot. That’s the future we’re staring at.

“The work is rigorous,” he added. “It doesn’t matter what job you do at UPS, whether you’re a part-timer moving packages, unloading them from the trailers, or loading them into the trucks, for the drivers to come in in the mornings and have their routes ready to go. It’s tough work. Getting up at 3:00, 4:00 in the morning and go ahead and start your schedule to preload, yeah, it is tough.

“You see a lot of your co-workers go through shoulder surgeries, elbows, your joints, knee replacements, hip

replacements. Some of these employees that walk out of there —your cartilage on your knees is giving out— they’re wobbling by the time they retire.”

Hugo rejected lies advanced by the ruling class and both parties that the problems in society are the fault of immigrants or the homeless.

“If you’re going to have a conversation about homeless people and immigrants taking from the system, well, have that conversation about the f***ing corporations not paying their fair share of taxes,” he said.

“I don’t want to hear you complain about the homeless and the immigrants and everybody that is so-called ‘draining the system.’ Both of these parties ... they throw money into whoever is going to go ahead and make them profitable. They have no loyalty to the working people or working families.”

Hugo predicted a massive response in the working class to Trump and the Republicans’ plans for mass deportations. “You are going to have a lot of these encampments back up under a different name. People are going to be pissed off as hell.”

He added that the fight to defend immigrants is the same fight against endless war. “I mean, labor is tied together to this, immigration is tied together to this, civil rights is tied to this. The defense industry they go ahead and proliferate these wars. They have got to go ahead and continue to make these, you know, bombs and artillery, you know, and continue to sell it because it’s profitable.

“[The Democrats] they are not going to go ahead and come out and talk about, you know, ‘Let’s liberate Palestine, let’s go ahead and have a ceasefire, let’s get Israel out of there,’ you know.”

While workers are left high and dry, he continued, “The banking industry wants a bailout, and Congress finds the money to go ahead and bail them out. No problem at all. You want universal health care? No, the money is not there. You want to go ahead and bail out student loans? The money is not there. It’s unconstitutional. They come up with all this b.s. just not to go ahead and be able to fund it.”

When this reporter raised the fact that Canadian Postal workers are currently on strike and face the same issues effecting UPS, logistic and other non-logistic workers, Hugo replied, “Canada should be like a mirror where we can stare at it and see exactly what is going on and what they want to do here.”



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