

Manhattan UPS workers sleep in cafeteria, wander streets overnight under split-shift regime

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Workers at UPS's 43rd Street hub in Manhattan are sleeping in the cafeteria, wandering the streets overnight and, in some cases, remaining separated from their families during the workweek after the company eliminated the Midnight shift and imposed split shifts.

The arrangement compels long-time full-time workers to perform a four-hour Twilight shift ending around 10:30 p.m., wait five or six unpaid hours, then return for a four-hour Preload shift beginning around 3:30 or 4:00 a.m. For many workers who commute an hour and a half each way, the interval is too short to travel home, eat, sleep and return.

"I would say there are between 50 and 100 people working the Twilight shift that ends about 10:30 p.m. and have to wait from then until 3:30 or sometimes 4:30 a.m. when the Preload shift starts," one worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "Some people go home during that time. Some people wander the city. Some people stay here. Some people sleep in the cafeteria. A lot of people are getting exhausted. One shift after another for eight hours is OK, but not this."

UPS pays for eight hours while taking control of 13 or 14 hours of the worker's day. The unpaid interval cannot be used for normal sleep, family life or, for many, even a practical trip home.

The conditions at 43rd Street are part of a nationwide restructuring. UPS says its 2024-25 "Fit to Serve" program eliminated approximately 14,000 positions, primarily in management. In 2025 it reduced its operational workforce by 48,000 positions, including 15,000 fewer seasonal positions, and closed daily operations at 93 buildings, 85 of them permanently. The company has announced plans to eliminate up to 30,000 additional operational positions and close 24

buildings in 2026.

UPS returned \$6.4 billion to shareholders through dividends and stock repurchases in 2025. It opened its highly automated Bayonne sorting facility in late 2023, shortly after the Teamsters bureaucracy proclaimed the 2023 contract a "historic victory."

In early 2024, UPS partly shut down the 43rd Street Midnight operation. Workers reported that roughly 40 full-time employees were brought inside and that combination helpers were removed from road work, displacing lower-seniority workers. A WARN notice filed with the New York State Department of Labor said 103 workers would be affected by the closure. After repeated delays, UPS finally carried it out on April 17, 2026.

The closure set off a chain reaction. A 43rd Street package car driver explained: "High seniority guys are getting bumped from the Midnight and going to other shifts. So, then you push other people with low seniority out. There are a number that are doing split shifts. Those are the ones who have two part-time positions combined into one. So, they do four hours and four hours."

For those who remain, life is increasingly confined to the building. A worker with 39 years at UPS said, "I was on the Midnight shift, and now there are easily over 40 people sleeping in the cafeteria every night."

Workers are taking drastic steps to escape. One worker became a full-time driver after 29 years inside the company. An 18-year driver observed: "It is tough to become a driver after 29 years when you haven't been a driver. But they are doing that to avoid the conditions of split-shift work."

Others give up full-time status and approximately

half their income to regain some control over their time. The 39-year worker described coworkers whose families live upstate: “To work these split shifts they have to stay in the city and only see their families on weekends.”

A worker with 32 years at UPS said, “What they have done with this split-shift work is force people to think about retirement.” The schedule gives UPS another means of driving veteran workers off the payroll.

The same conditions were imposed at UPS’s Maspeth hub in Queens after the Midnight shift closed in May 2024. Around 120 full-time workers were offered a choice between split shifts, transfer to another facility or part-time status. Approximately 75 accepted split shifts; others transferred or gave up full-time status.

At first, management and security forced workers who were trying to sleep inside the building to leave. Some slept in their cars or outside. Shortly after the split shifts began, one full-time Maspeth worker fell asleep while driving home and crashed.

The same danger now confronts workers at 43rd Street. The 39-year worker said: “We finish the Twilight shift at 10 p.m. and then start Preload at 3:30 a.m. We are not getting eight hours of sleep. This can cause safety problems and accidents. This is done to discourage people from continuing to work.”

When workers raised these dangers at a Teamsters union meeting after the 43rd Street closure, they were told there would be no fight. “We told them how unhealthy this was and how it could result in accidents,” the worker said. “The union meeting had no solution. They said this couldn’t be stopped by filing grievances. A strike for a group this small was off the table. ‘Maybe next contract,’ they dodged.”

Local 804 President Vincent Perrone and several executive board members attended. Another worker reported: “The meeting was a joke and a waste of time. I found being there a waste of valuable sleep time. The split shift is now the new norm. That was the bottom line.”

The meeting was held at 11 p.m., during the few hours split-shift workers have available for rest. Its timing expressed the officials’ indifference to the conditions workers were protesting.

The Local 804 supplement states that, after ten consecutive days on split shifts, laid-off full-time

workers may request the work of two contiguous shifts in a hub building. Local 804 has neither enforced a return to continuous schedules nor organized collective action to compel UPS to restore them.

Workers at 43rd Street are not isolated. UPS is carrying out the same restructuring throughout its network. The Teamsters apparatus divides workers by facility, shift, classification and local jurisdiction, then cites those divisions as a reason nothing can be done. Sean O’Brien declared the 2023 contract a “historic victory,” after which UPS accelerated automation, facility closures and job cuts.

Workers at 43rd Street and Maspeth should form a joint rank-and-file committee, independent of the Teamsters apparatus and democratically controlled by workers. It should unite full-time, part-time, laid off and displaced workers, circulate information throughout the UPS network and prepare collective action.

Its immediate demands should include restoration of eliminated shifts and jobs, an end to split shifts, no reduction in pay or full-time status and rank-and-file control over scheduling and the introduction of automation.

Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, UPS workers can link their struggle with postal and logistics workers in the United States and internationally who confront layoffs, automation and intensified workloads.

Workers built and operate UPS’s vast logistics network. It should serve public need, not shareholder returns. The fight at 43rd Street raises the question of whether new technology and integrated networks will lighten workers’ burdens or be used to destroy jobs and take control of their lives.



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