



NEW DAY AT UPS

NEWS FOR UPS WORKERS, BY UPS WORKERS!

FIXING THE PROBLEM OF POOR WORKING CONDITIONS

by James Loader (WCHNC)

It's now been over a month since the new agreement between Teamsters and UPS was put into effect. UPS's petty attempts to win sympathy from UPSers are over and Teamsters officials have gone back into their holes, hardly to be seen until the next time they're forced to interact with rank and file. The propaganda has mostly died down and UPS remains completely unchallenged on the shop floor.

One of the principal issues with the "new" contract (in reality, the vast majority of the contract is literally copy-pasted from previous agreements and many of the worst givebacks are still there) between Teamsters and UPS is the complete lack of any protections for inside workers. Absolutely vital operational details, such as the speed of work or the ratio of staff to volume, are not mentioned in the contract. This is done deliberately in order to give UPS maximum control over rates and hours at our expense. The only answer UPS has for the question of work rate is "more". This has been readily apparent at the West Charlotte hub, with conditions only deteriorating further since the "new" contract has been put into effect.

In Charlotte, over the past month, UPS has used every sleazy method in the book to squeeze as much out of its workforce as possible. Shifts have been staggered, with management having a few selected loaders and unloaders come in early so that when the bulk of inside workers come in, the belts are already backed up and running at maximum capacity. UPS has also been trying to trim the number of loaders to decrease the overall cost of labor, refusing to let anyone more than a few minutes late clock in and sending others home at the start of the shift. Management has been telling UPSers they should come in 15-20 minutes before their start times to avoid being sent home or starting the work day backed up. Workers are expected to show up but not necessarily start working (and get paid) until the belts are at full capacity, and in fact UPS has a history of legal issues involving wage theft and to this day timecard "discrepancies" are a common occurrence.

The sleaze goes even deeper, of course. In an effort to maximize the rate of packages being loaded and shorten shifts, the main belt at the West Charlotte hub has been running nearly double its recommended capacity. Hearing an ear-piercing screech as the belt struggles to handle the number of packages has become commonplace. This phenomenon is common across large hubs, especially ones with older equipment such as WORMA, and is possibly a violation of OSHA's occupational noise exposure rules. (Unfortunately, there seems to be no systematic study of tinnitus/hearing damage among UPS workers, so it is hard to say what the full extent of the damage is.) All of this has an effect on loaders who are being forced to load a steadily increasing number of packages per hour. Some loads that are heading in opposite directions are even combined, so that management can take advantage of hard workers and reduce their spending on hours at the expense of other hubs' hours.

The "new" contract failed to deliver part-time warehouse workers a guaranteed break. For most of the country, this is not a big deal. However, in Charlotte, this is a serious problem. Teamsters Local 71, which covers the West Charlotte warehouse, is unable to ensure a ten-minute break for part-time warehouse workers despite this being nearly standard across the country. With recent speed-ups, this issue has become even more glaring as Charlotte UPSers are doing even more work without being given a few minutes to catch their breath or grab a drink of water. This is especially felt in the summer and early fall when temperatures inside trucks frequently climb above a hundred degrees Fahrenheit. This is not just inconvenient, but dangerous. Last month in Texas, a package car driver named Christopher Begley died after being exposed to extreme temperatures. In July, at the West Charlotte warehouse, a worker was severely injured after working a heavy shift on a particularly hot day, and they were sent out in an ambulance.

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The main task is building an actual union of the inside workers, and since the crucial issue of work rate is not even covered by the Teamsters contract, it makes complete sense to try to establish a uniform work rate that people agree they can do safely and reasonably for their pay rate, and have a coordinated campaign to bring everyone down to it. A big question is, would the Teamsters side with UPS in this? This could technically be interpreted as a slowdown, but if everyone participating simply denied it and said they were working as fast as they can using the right work methods, then it would not be a contract violation. In other industries this would be called "working to the letter", but in our case, the part-Democrat-part-fascist-gangster Teamsters would potentially refuse to represent us if we carried out such an action. There is also the difficulty of organizing such an action, how many people would be willing to do it and how many would resort to scabbing or ratting? We cannot take a single person for granted. We are trying to build a shop-floor organization capable of bringing UPSers together in shared economic action for the benefit of all of us. (One among many tasks, of course.) All of the problems that existed on July 31 are still here. None of them are going to go away on their own, and certainly not because of any goodwill from UPS or the IBT. The question for us is, what exactly is a reasonable work rate and what will it take to get people to follow it?



An ambulance waits outside of the West Charlotte hub in North Carolina

TEAMSTERS AT YELLOW: A BANKRUPT COMPANY AND A BANKRUPT THEORY

by Frank Loder (WORMA)

Many UPSers have heard about the bankruptcy of the Yellow company, a less-than-truckload logistics company that employed tens of thousands of Teamsters. The company is auctioning off its assets right now, and its workers are searching for new jobs. What most UPSers probably do not know about Yellow, however, is the role that the IBT played in sabotaging the living standards of its employees, supposedly to save the company, and even in its last days thwarting a strike that Yellow employees overwhelmingly voted for.

Yellow is the most recent piece of evidence that the IBT's "theory" of capitulation, the idea that our long term interests are served by the unions catering to the needs of corporate, is completely wrong. This theory leads only to selling the workers piece by piece until the jobs themselves are sold off. Look at how the Teamsters describe their role at Yellow in a statement from August 7: "Yellow has been plagued with financial trouble for nearly two decades as dedicated working families have given up substantial earnings and pension securities to salvage Yellow from its corporate struggles. In 2011, Teamsters agreed to a massive pay cut to keep YRC Freight in business. The concessions from workers continued in the years that followed." General President O'Brien repeated the same and Secretary-Treasurer Zuckerman flatly stated, "Yellow benefitted from historically low labor costs [] compared to other freight leaders, yet they still managed to drive the company into the ground."

In late July, the Teamsters called off an authorized strike at Yellow. Why? What did the workers have to lose at that point? The IBT claimed it was to give Yellow 30 more days to pay the tens of millions of dollars they owed to workers' pensions. It only helped Yellow: they immediately emptied their inventory and began shopping around for potential asset buyers. Estes Express Lines, another less-than-truckload logistics company, bid 1525 billion dollars for Yellow terminals. Freightwaves reported that this bid "exceeds all amounts owed to secured creditors." We have a complete picture of Teamsters' role at Yellow Corp: sweetheart deal after sweetheart deal was signed with the company, work stoppages were thwarted even under extremely dire conditions, and in the end, the "struggling" company was able to sell off billions of dollars of assets and compensate its executives millions of dollars with no opposition from the supposed representatives of the workers. This is what the "theory" of capitulation and the "representation" of the IBT has to offer. And we see the same thing happening right now at UPS, as even mild gains in language (such as 8 hour requests for a limited number of drivers) are reinterpreted by the company and union so as to be meaningless. The reality is, a company's solvency (its ability to earn more than it spends) comes from the conditions of the market it operates in and the policy of its management. Yellow went under because it was profitable and convenient for its owners. It never occurred to the IBT to strike against its self-destructive policies, and in fact, they acted as accomplices to Yellow Corp every step of the way. Is it any wonder their membership is a fraction of what it was decades ago, and the only people they are able to organize are graduate students and police officers?



New Day is a newsletter produced by UPS workers to rally our coworkers against UPS corporate and their agents in the Teamsters. New Day Committees are for gathering information and disseminating the basic outlook of the revolutionary UPS workers to the rank and file in the operation, as well as a base that our coworkers can use as a launchpad for campaigns around more immediate issues. Our long-term goal is the creation of a revolutionary industrial logistics union.

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