

Teamsters confirm closure of UPS Swan Island hub in Portland as part of nationwide automation drive

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UPS workers: Take up the fight against closures and layoffs! Join the UPS Worker Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form below.

UPS will close its Swan Island hub in Portland, Oregon, this summer in order to convert it into an automated facility, the Teamsters union confirmed in a local meeting Sunday. The move will impact around 600 people, who still work at the facility.

This is the latest hub to be closed since the passage of the new Teamsters contract in 2023, which union officials falsely described as a “historic” victory. In reality, it is a key piece of the company’s so-called “Network of the Future” restructuring, which threatens tens of thousands of jobs. Threatening to automate “everything,” management intends to close or automate 200 facilities under the program, while citing the “labor certainty” of the new contract as key to their plans.

The contract was passed under false pretenses, following a “strike-ready” campaign by the Teamsters, which in reality had no intention of striking. This was a public relations stunt designed to present the contract they had worked out with management as the product of “hard bargaining.”

Other facilities targeted for closure in recent weeks include hubs in Commerce City, Colorado; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and the Grande Vista hub in Vernon, California.

The closure of Swan Island was long suspected, with various sources reporting to the WSWs that the move was in the works. The hub was also one of many throughout the country where the company eliminated day sort shifts, affecting hundreds of jobs at this facility alone.

It is urgent that UPS workers build a rank-and-file movement to force a stop to these closures. The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, built in 2023 to fight

the sellout contract, has consistently warned that these layoffs were coming while the Teamsters has maintained a guilty silence.

The unity of workers around the world is critical to this fight. The closures at UPS are part of a massive worldwide cost-cutting campaign, including the post offices in the US, Canada, Britain and other countries, and in the auto industry and even “white collar” industries, such as the technology and film sectors in which automation is being weaponized to destroy jobs.

The natural allies of UPS workers are workers at the US Postal Service, decimated by restructuring and targeted for privatization under Trump, Canada Post workers who struck for more than a month before the Trudeau government banned the strike, Royal Mail workers in Britain, Amazon workers and other logistics workers around the world who are fighting against the corporate oligarchy.

Workers must insist that they have the right to take all measures necessary to defend their jobs. This can only be put into practice through a struggle to transfer power out of the hands of the corrupt union officials and into the hands of workers themselves, replacing the bureaucracy with new leadership drawn from the rank and file.

The bureaucracy’s sole concern is maintaining its corrupt relations with management and with the corporate political parties. Over the holidays, the Teamsters called a nationwide strike at Amazon, which was then shut down after only a few days. While this showed the possibility of a powerful movement uniting UPS, Amazon and other sections of the working class, the Teamsters had called it only to bolster their credibility after massive betrayals.

Meanwhile, the Teamsters bureaucracy and General President Sean O’Brien are close allies of Trump, having de facto endorsed him in the November election. O’Brien

has publicly promoted Trump's racist "America First" rhetoric, falsely presenting attacks on immigrants and trade war measures as being to the benefit of workers in the United States. In reality, this is aimed at covering up the responsibility of the oligarchs in America, assisted by their lackeys in the trade unions, in carrying out mass layoffs.

Worsening conditions at UPS

The Sunday meeting in Portland, which was little advertised to the wider workforce and sparsely attended (outside of those close to the Teamsters bureaucracy), also confirmed that workers who transferred to other hubs in the region would lose their Market Rate Adjustment (MRA). MRAs are local pay increases, implemented at the discretion of management at individual locations to attract labor when the wages "negotiated" in the Teamsters contract are too low.

The fate of MRAs was a major issue in the 2023 contract. While the Teamsters boasted of starting pay increases to \$21 per hour for part-time warehouse workers, rising to \$23 in 2028, it was unclear whether this could simply be canceled out in many areas by eliminating MRAs which were already at or above that level. Evasive statements at the time by Teamsters officials suggested that this was at the discretion of management.

"We didn't vote for this," one Swan Island worker said.

Another worker said, "After losing day shift I don't know if I can handle another big change. And now, the union say 'oh you'll still have a job,' but what kind of job? Loading trailers? In my 50s? After decades here?"

In addition to the loss of the day shift, management at Swan Island has continuously dwindled down preparation time before shifts from 45 to 20 minutes, which workers now call "poverty time."

Nationwide, unsafe working conditions are rampant. Last month, a fire ripped through a UPS warehouse in Athens, Tennessee, destroying packages and damaging nearly two dozen delivery vehicles.

"Once the fire happened, the employees were moved to the Knoxville facility and are working out of a temporary village, and getting all of the packages moved to the Athens area from the Knoxville facility," the Teamsters Local 519 President told the local station Newschannel 9.

"They're working 10 to 12 hours, and now they've sacrificed, from the Athens facility, to drive an hour away."

Meanwhile, the wait for part-timers, the overwhelming majority of the company's workforce, to move to full-time positions has increased to 7 years to over a decade. The Teamsters had boasted that the new contract would "create" 7,500 new full-time jobs, which will be more than offset by the "Network of the Future" restructuring, if they ever happen.

The WSWs spoke to workers at the Maspeth hub in New York City over the holiday season, where workers are sleeping in their cars between split shifts in order to keep their full-time status. "Here it is peak season, and the business volume is insane which makes the work exhausting," one worker said. "You just want to finish work and go home and sleep every day. There are drivers coming to our center because we need help, but it is only like 5 people. ... There are workers here working split shifts where one shift ends at 10:30 p.m. and the next starts at 4:00 a.m. Many can't go home.

"We can't get information here about what is happening outside our building. The union should be doing that and keeping us informed about what is going on all over. The union is supposed to represent everybody. But they are playing with workers, like the Combo Helpers. They are not calling them until one hour before their shift starts to tell them where in the city they have to go to meet the truck they have to help deliver from."

Workers at the hub were disgusted to learn that in Canada, the Teamsters were forcing workers at Purolator to scab on a nationwide Canada Post strike.

One worker commented, "That is messed up. It is not what a union is supposed to do. A union is supposed to support striking workers. It sounds corrupt to me."

Another said, "I believe the union who scabs doesn't have the right to speak poorly of any worker choosing to get overtime. The union supporter portion of me makes me disgusted. It's like looking at an addict being abused by their sponsor and smiling through it."



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