As workers' opposition grows

Teamsters union extends UPS contract deadline to impose sell-out deal

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On Tuesday, the Teamsters union and the United Parcel Service (UPS) announced that they were indefinitely extending the deadline for negotiations on a new labor contract. The current agreement covering a quarter million UPS workers is set to expire on July 31.

The announcement came the same day that the union published the full details of the sell-out deal already reached with the company late last month. Among other concessions, the agreement includes the creation of a new second-tier of "hybrid" class truck drivers that is aimed at undermining and destroying decent-paid delivery positions.

While the union claims the extension is aimed at allowing time for finalizing local supplementary agreements, its real aim is to provide the union with time to smother mass opposition among rank-and-file workers. At the start of June, more than 93 percent of the 230,000 UPS drivers, warehouse and other workers voted to authorize strike action at the end of July.

Heather, a depot warehouse worker, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the union has begun deleting critical comments on an internal app for UPS members used to provide updates on the contract. The UPS Rising Facebook page, which is controlled by the union, has deleted or hidden almost 200 comments on its link to the new agreement. The page announced that it will instead collate questions from workers into a single "Frequently Asked Questions" document.

The union is particularly concerned to prevent any strike action because it is aware that the opposition among UPS workers reflects growing anger in the entire working class. In the first six months of 2018, the total number of labor strikes in the US has exceeded the number of strikes in all of last year, prompting growing fears in the ruling class of the threat of a "wages push."

Teachers across the US carried out state-wide strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona that developed in opposition to the national teachers unions. This is part of an international process, including the nationwide strike of New Zealand nurses, who this week voted to reject a union-backed sell-out agreement. There have been strikes this year by railway workers in France, industrial workers in Germany, metal workers in Turkey and many other sections of the working class.

The new UPS agreement reached by the Teamsters includes the creation of "full-time combination drivers," a new class of workers who will be paid a lower wage than current full-time workers. They can be scheduled for both weekend days without overtime pay, allowing UPS to save millions of dollars in overtime payments. Until now, UPS drivers have been one of the few remaining decent-paying hourly positions at the company.

Casey, a UPS truck driver from California with 23 years at the company, told the WSWS, "This contract is total crap. Part-time employees are getting shafted. The hybrid drivers will take all the work for less money, then get screwed by UPS because there is no language in [the] contract to protect them from excessive overtime."

The second-tier workers will start out at $20.50 per hour and be paid a maximum of $34.79 by 2022, significantly less than what drivers currently make. The agreement states that these new second-tier jobs will count towards the company's agreement to create 5,000 new full-time jobs. More than 70 percent of UPS employees are already in low-paid, part-time work,

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many making as little as $10 per hour.

The agreement includes a worthless pledge to maintain a 25 percent limit on these “combination” drivers, but states that this can be negotiated by the company and union “based on demonstrated service need.”

Roland, a full-time driver, commented on the UPS Rising Facebook page, “No mention of what the penalties would be if the company violates 25 percent of the workforce. It does not take a genius to see that the full timers at top pay would have a target on their back. In fact, with all the harassment that goes on, and no additional language on that, there is nothing to stop them from replacing us and saving money.”

Danny, another worker, commented, “Why is UPS and the union so together on the issue of the combo driver BS? Who’s the big winner in that? I don’t think it’s us. Ok then they’re gonna plop a contract on us and say go home, read this, we vote tomorrow. Does anyone think this is good for us? But by some miracle I’ll bet it gets done.”

The union’s evidence for the “victory” of its deal is the fact that part-time workers will now begin on $13 per hour, instead of $10, and max out at $15.50 by 2022. This maximum wage is so low that many UPS warehouses have already been forced to offer it to secure enough part-time workers.

Heather, who has worked part-time for three years, told the WSWS, “We’re supposed to be so thrilled with $15 per hour. My wage is currently $15. It’s impossible to live. I’m going to be 24 next month, and I still live with my parents. I’m working slowly to get through college. I can’t pay for food or rent.”

Heather added, “The union’s primary motive is to raise money for themselves and to prevent strikes. I know that several of the higher-ups in union leadership are good friends with higher-ups in UPS. They go and play golf together. It’s a general understanding among the workers that that happens.”

While the agreement contains no gains for workers, it does provide a further increase in dues revenue for the union executives. The proposed contract includes a new clause mandating that UPS deduct union dues from workers for every vacation week, so that they can continue to pay the union for the privilege of being sold out even while they are not at work.

The deal has been opposed by a “dissident” faction of the union apparatus, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, which yesterday released a statement calling for a “no” vote. The TDU’s perspective is that workers must bring pressure to bear on the union to force it to adopt a more militant policy.

As the union’s efforts to censor and suppress opposition to its sell-out demonstrate, however, these organizations will not respond to rank-and-file opposition through “reform,” but repression. The Socialist Equality Party calls on UPS workers to build rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, independent of the union, to begin discussing and organizing opposition to the contract. These committees should fight to mobilize the entire working class against the bipartisan attack on wages, jobs and social programs.

The struggles of UPS workers must be connected to those of other warehouse and logistics workers, including the 200,000 workers at USPS, whose contract is set to expire on September 20, and Amazon workers. An appeal must be made to teachers, autoworkers, and other sections of the working class for a common struggle.

The SEP urges UPS workers to read and distribute our recent statement, “The way forward for UPS workers,” and to contact the World Socialist Web Site *for assistance in organizing workplace committees.*

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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