

Teamsters union blackmails UPS workers: Approve contract or your wages will be cut

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The Teamsters Union is seeking to blackmail UPS workers into voting for its sellout contract proposal by threatening that a “no” vote will result in an even worse offer.

A UPS worker provided the *World Socialist Web Site* with a letter sent out to all New York state UPS Teamster members by Local 687 president Brian Hammond. The letter, dated July 16, includes the following threat:

“Health and pension—the company has agreed to pay the full amount needed to the health and pension fund of \$5.28 over the life of the agreement. They will do this only if we pass our supplement [agreement] the first time. If not, the extra amount will come from your wage increase like before. Currently FT [full-time] employees have \$1.95 per hour diverted to pension. I do not want to see that number increase!”

Supplementary agreements are worked out by local Teamsters unions and apply in addition to the national master contract. Hammond’s letter is a threat that if workers vote against the agreement, the already low wage increases that it contains will be lost and diverted to the company’s pension obligations.

The Teamsters’ statement demonstrates yet again that it functions not as a representative of the workers against the company, but as an agency of the company against the workers. If the union were in any way answerable to the rank-and-file workers, a “no” vote would be taken as a mandate for a national strike to meet workers’ demands for improved wages and conditions.

But the Teamsters view a “no” vote as an insolent affront and obstacle to their cooperation with management and participation in the boosting of UPS’s profits. Hammond’s letter is also aimed at dividing younger workers from those nearing retirement, by threatening younger workers with paying more toward current pensions.

The UPS worker who sent the WSWS Hammond’s

letter, and wished to remain anonymous to avoid retribution by the union, told this reporter, “The union is supposed to represent us, the dues-paying members, but they’re in collusion with the company and doing the company’s bidding with them. That’s the belief among the workers at the building I work for. It’s basically a tool for the company.”

Hammond, whose officially reported income as Local 687 president is \$100,000, is a seasoned expert at cutting workers’ pensions. He sits on the board of the New York State Teamsters Conference Pension and Retirement Fund as one of its four “labor” trustees. Last September, the Teamsters conspired to slash pension pay outs to retired workers by up to 30 percent.

The union sent ballots to all 34,000 workers covered under the fund, asking whether they supported cuts to pensions. More than 9,700 workers voted against the cuts, with only 4,081 voting in favor. The Teamsters then utilized the fact that the more than 20,000 eligible Teamsters members who did not vote could be counted as a “yes” under federal law to ram the cuts through. A typical retiree’s monthly pension benefit fell from approximately \$5,000 to \$3,000 the following month.

The UPS worker explained, “It was a complete sham. They sent a vote out to anyone, including those who worked there for three days. They got a ballot and it was counted as a ‘yes.’”

The worker said his own pension had already been cut several years earlier, in 2011, when the union set a retirement age of 55. Previously, workers could retire at any age, so long as they had worked for at least 30 years.

Hammond’s letter is full of lies aimed at strong arming workers into voting in favor of the agreement. It begins by referring to an unnamed “group [on Facebook] trying to discourage the membership of [sic] voting in favor of the new agreement. Mainly because of the new classification of 22.4 drivers. I can tell you that this classification is a

necessity for upstate New York!”

The new 22.4 position is a second-tier driver/warehouse worker “hybrid” that would be paid less than current drivers. Hammond claims that accepting the new category would “force the hiring of full-time employees delivering packages at UPS.”

In fact, the position is aimed at destroying the last remaining better-paid, full-time position at the company. The contract now states that existing full-time drivers will be provided with five consecutive days of eight hours each week, “so long as work is available.”

Hammond’s letter is in line with the union’s manoeuvres throughout the contract negotiations. At the beginning of June, 93 percent of UPS workers voted to authorize strike action with the expiration of the current contract on July 31.

On July 10, the union published an announcement that it was extending the negotiations beyond the deadline. This is to buy time, wear down workers’ opposition and prevent a walkout. There has still been no date set for a vote on the deal.

UPS workers cannot fight to defend their conditions through the Teamsters union. The unions are not defensive organizations of the working class. They are labor-management syndicates that police the working class on behalf of the corporations. Workers need new organizations to fight.

Rank-and-file factory committees must be established in every depot and warehouse to develop opposition to the proposed contract and ensure it is rejected. Workers must take the struggle out of the Teamsters union, and unite with other warehouse and distribution workers, including at Amazon, FedEx and the US Postal Service, in the United States and internationally in a common struggle against the class war on workers’ jobs, wages and conditions.



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