

“We are underpaid slaves”

Growing opposition among UPS workers as Teamsters conference endorses sellout contracts

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Opposition is continuing to grow among UPS workers following a national meeting of Teamsters officials in Chicago, Illinois on Thursday, which endorsed the widely-opposed sellout contracts with UPS and UPS Freight.

Following the meeting, Dennis Taylor, the co-chairman of the Teamsters National UPS Negotiating Committee, who has an officially reported salary of \$232,000, declared that the agreement “provides all our UPS members with tremendous gains in wages, benefits and working conditions.”

The real nature of the contracts, however, was made clear in the gloating response by UPS management to the Teamsters executives’ endorsement. A company statement declared: “UPS is pleased that Teamster leadership throughout the country have approved the small-package and freight tentative national agreements.” It noted that the agreements “include provisions that give UPS greater flexibility,” including for “expanded weekend residential services, as well as to address challenges from competitors.”

The Teamsters is now set to send out ballots for a vote on the contracts. No date has been publicly announced for the vote. The union already extended negotiations beyond the end of the last contract in order to buy time to suppress workers’ opposition.

The agreements include the creation of a second-tier of lower-paid “hybrid” delivery drivers, which is aimed at extending part-time work from the warehouses to deliveries. Pay for part timers, who make up 70 percent of the workforce, would rise to a derisory \$15.50 by the end of the contract, leaving the majority of the

workforce in poverty. The contract covering UPS Freight workers contains similar concessions.

Dozens of workers have spoken with the *UPS Workers Newsletter* to voice their opposition to the contract and describe the impact of the Teamsters’ collaboration with UPS management.

James, a 25-year-old part-time loader in Madison Heights, Michigan is paid just over \$13 an hour. He has been at UPS for four years, and his weekly check is just over \$100. Like most part-timers, he works a second job to make ends meet. “You have to do that,” he said. He works at a local carwash, where he is paid \$6.75, less than the minimum wage, under the table.

“I come in at 3 or 4 AM to UPS and get off at 8 or 9 AM,” he said. “It’s hot and muggy. We ask for fans, and they tell us we can’t because it would blow all the dust around. I wake up every day and don’t want to come in here.”

The conditions are so bad that many workers leave after a few days on the job, James said. “Just today a guy started, was working next to me, and said he wasn’t coming back tomorrow because it’s too hard. It’s because of the union and the people who own this place; it’s not the workers’ fault. It’s like this everywhere. That’s why lots of people are on the street and people want to sell drugs. If there were jobs and they paid decent, you wouldn’t see that.

“The union keeps talking about how great the contract is, how we’ll get a raise,” James said. “We’re supposed to get a few dollars by 2022. I don’t even think we’ll get it. But if we did, it would be worth less than it is now.”

James has had his own experience with the Teamsters union over the last four years. He said the Teamsters is “not for us, that’s for sure. If it was, they would be trying to help us.”

“Once I was working on a Saturday,” he explained. “I had eight cars to load. I went to the union and asked, ‘Why aren’t we getting some more loaders?’ They said I had lower seniority so that’s why I had to work the Saturday. He said to do what the company said. I said, ‘This is slavery, you’ve got me doing 2,000 packages, and I’m not getting any help.’ He just told me to get back to it.”

“I don’t know why we don’t just go on strike. The whole place could go on strike. They can’t do anything if there’s no workers. But the union isn’t saying anything about a strike.”

James read over the section of the WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* statement urging UPS workers to form their own rank-and-file committees to draw up their own demands to launch a nationwide strike. “It would be great to have our own committee,” he said. “All we have to do is get together. We wouldn’t tell the union anything, just get our signs about ‘going on strike,’ and go out. They should pay us more. We need more hours. Four or five hours a day is nothing.”

“It would have to be nationwide,” he added. “I could write a letter to other workers for a strike and say, ‘it needs to be nationwide.’”

In Wisconsin, a driver of 12 years told the *UPS Workers Newsletter*, “No union has worked so hard for the success of a company and given so much should be asked to give in to this type of concession.”

The driver was particularly opposed to the efforts to introduce a new second tier of “hybrid” drivers. “Once the company gets this classification, it’s just the beginning of the end of ‘regular drivers’, and [Teamsters President] James Hoffa is the guy who agreed to this. He is the epitome of a sellout.

“Over the last 12 years I’ve worked for UPS, these contracts went through without much trouble,” the driver explained, arguing that this was due to the Teamsters’ common practice of stuffing ballots or sending ballots out late to ensure a “yes” vote. “But with the advent of social media, the members are starting to stand up and say this is BS.”

Rick, a long-time driver, said, “The company and shareholders get more out of this contract than we do.”

Since the full contract was released on July 10, the value of UPS stock increased by more than 11 percent, with Wall Street applauding the enforcement of cost-cutting ahead of the upcoming holiday “peak” season. He said the fact that the contract was aimed at boosting profits “goes against everything a union is supposed to stand for. It’s truly disheartening on what it has become.”

Rick said he believed a wildcat strike by workers “should be a viable option... Strength is always in numbers. If everyone bands together and sees that we can stand strong, we can make change.”

The WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* urges UPS workers to build their own organizations of struggle, rank-and-file committees in every hub and warehouse, to unite with workers across UPS, at Amazon and USPS, and prepare for a coordinated offensive against the corporations. These committees should draw up their own demands as the basis for a nationwide strike. The campaign for a “no” vote should raise the demand for workers’ oversight over the balloting process and verification of the integrity of the vote.

We urge UPS workers who wish to take up such a struggle to contact us today.



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