

“A new organization would be able to unite us all”

## UPS workers oppose isolation by Teamsters, call for united struggle with Amazon workers

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There are growing calls among UPS workers for a fight against the concessions contract backed by the company and the Teamsters, and for a united struggle with their counterparts at Amazon and other logistics companies.

The Teamsters is working to push through a sellout contract that will boost UPS profits, create a new, lower-paid tier of “hybrid” driver/warehouse workers, and maintain poverty wages for part-time warehouse workers.

Manuel, a full-time “22.3” warehouse worker with 14 years at the Ontario hub in southern California, said he has “not met a single person who is excited about this contract. We’re all voting it down, but I also fear it will be shoved down our throats.”

Manuel told the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter*, “I agree with the need to unite workers at Amazon and UPS, and even more than that. UPS is bad, and Amazon is worse. A new organization would be able to unite us all.” He added that “there is potential for a wildcat strike” against the Teamsters union. “It would catch on like a wildfire.”

The Teamsters is opposed to any effort to connect the struggle of UPS workers with their counterparts at Amazon, because it opposes any serious fight against the demands of the corporations. It is not a workers’ organization, but a labor management business, tasked with ensuring a supply of cheap labor to the employer by suppressing strike action.

This reality was demonstrated at the Teamsters Local 70 meeting in Oakland, California yesterday. A UPS worker who attended told the *WSWS* that workers in the meeting asked Teamsters Local 70 Secretary Treasurer Marty Frates if there should be a strike in the

event the contract was voted down. Frates replied: “No one wants that.”

Later in the meeting, Frates, whose officially reported income is over \$140,000, was asked his opinion as to whether UPS workers should reach out to their counterparts at Amazon, to which he responded: “No, that’s our competition.”

Frates’ pro-corporate statements were denounced by workers who spoke to the *WSWS* after the meeting. John, a part-time warehouse worker with 10 years, said, “We shouldn’t be competing with Amazon workers, we should be helping them. We should be setting an example. UPS is taking advantage of the situation and saying, ‘Amazon is doing this, so we might as well do it to our members too.’”

Earlier this week, John read the *WSWS*’s call for UPS workers to elect their own organizations, rank-and-file committees in the warehouses and hubs, in opposition to the Teamsters union, in order to conduct a struggle. He said that when he read this statement, “It was like a light bulb going off in my head. I realized that we don’t need to wait on the union to fight this contract.”

On August 7, the “Vote No on UPS Contract” Facebook page, which is connected to the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, a faction of the Teamsters union, censored a post of Amazon worker Shannon Allen’s video calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees connecting Amazon and UPS workers. The Teamsters resorts to censorship because it is aware that such appeals have widespread support among both Amazon and UPS workers.

UPS and Amazon workers perform similar work, and warehouse workers are paid similarly low wages.

Starting wages for part-time UPS warehouse workers, who make up over 70 percent of the workforce, are as low as \$10 per hour, approximately the same as their Amazon counterparts.

Amazon has used advanced automation technologies to create a high-tech nightmare for its employees, with brutal working conditions, surveillance of workers, and constant electronic monitoring of workers' performance. This model—the intensified exploitation of half a million Amazon workers around the world—underpins Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' wealth of \$150 billion. Other corporations, including UPS, are being driven to implement similar measures to remain competitive.

This is what the Teamsters means when it labels Amazon “our competition.” Workers must accept longer working hours, lower wages, more “flexible” working arrangements, cuts to their health benefits, cuts to their pensions, and increased quotas—in a race to the bottom to meet the insatiable profit demands of UPS management and the Wall Street investors who stand behind them. The Teamsters bureaucrats are all too willing to facilitate this process, knowing they will be repaid in kind by their corporate partners.

John said that his Oakland facility was automated two years ago, eliminating 100 jobs from the sorting aisle. “Today a worker unloads packages out of a trailer, and instead of coming to somebody to look at the state and the zip code, it goes down a belt, the lasers shoot it, and then the belts pull it wherever it needs to go for its destination,” he said.

John commented that this automation is meant to handle the increased volume coming from Amazon's online orders, many of which are delivered by UPS. “Ever since they automated the building, they've just been catering to the Amazon style, which is just more, more, more,” he said. “They want more numbers. They've automated it pretty much just for Amazon, and even created a UPS facility in Lathrop, a super-hub near Sacramento, which just does volume for Amazon and reduces their shipping costs.”

Heather, a part-time pre-loader at the Tualatin hub in Oregon with three years' experience, also rejected the Teamsters-imposed isolation of UPS workers. She said, “The union has this attitude of, ‘You have it better, so just take it.’ The only way to overcome that is to form alliances with other workers at Amazon and around the

world. We have to start planning and reach out as a UPS group to other workers, like Amazon, through leafleting or by social media. This can make a big difference.”

Heather said that at her Portland facility, “they get the upper layers of management to assess statistics, track all of us, and come up with some new rules that make our work more demanding. They really don't understand what would help. It's all about numbers.”

The Teamsters is isolating workers not only at UPS and Amazon, but within UPS itself. It is negotiating three separate contracts within one company—one for warehouse workers and parcel delivery drivers, one for UPS Freight workers, and one for airline workers and mechanics.

The Teamsters' sabotage of any fight against the assault on workers by UPS shows that workers need new organizations to conduct a struggle. The *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* calls for UPS workers to elect rank-and-file committees in the warehouses and hubs, independently of the Teamsters union. Such committees would draw up their own demands for a nationwide strike, and immediately send delegations to factories at Amazon, USPS, FedEx, and elsewhere, to explain the significance of this struggle and organize a united fight.



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