

Teamsters blackmails UPS workers: Strike and you will lose your health insurance

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In the two weeks since the August 9 national conference of Teamsters, which endorsed its concessions contracts with UPS management, the union's strategy to push through its sellout has become even more blatant.

While continuing to keep workers in the dark about the date of a vote, the Teamsters is now dispatching bureaucrats across the country to intimidate and blackmail members into voting "yes" and threaten workers that the union will sabotage any strike.

On Sunday, a room of 100 UPS workers at Local 542 in San Diego, California, erupted in anger as the Teamsters' UPS Director for the Western Region, Andy Marshall, reprimanded them for having the nerve to expect a fight to improve their wages and conditions.

The union's agreement allows the company to create a new "hybrid" driver/warehouse worker role that is paid less than current drivers and will be used to extend part-time work from the warehouses to the delivery vans. It maintains poverty wages for part-time warehouse workers, who currently receive as little as \$10 per hour.

This, Marshall declared, "was the best we could get." In a "perfect world," workers would get everything, "but when I was a kid, I also wanted a pony." The company "has to be competitive," he said.

As the workers became increasingly angered by Marshall's pro-company propaganda, he threatened that the union would sabotage the growing demands for a strike.

First, he made clear the union will attempt to starve workers into submission by refusing to use the \$160 million strike fund, paid for by workers' dues. "Ask yourself a question," he declared. "Did you put money

aside to be able to stay out? The last strike [in 1997] was 16 days... If we go on strike, you have to ask yourself how long you can afford to stay out there and what we're going to accomplish out there."

Next, he said workers risked losing healthcare coverage for themselves and their families in the event of a protracted strike. "You have to have one minute of time on the clock [each week] in order for UPS to make a contribution," he said. "No one is going to be without health insurance unless this strike goes for a huge amount of time. The trouble is, you get into week number three and you have an emergency in your family, and you have to go back and pay all three weeks of COBRA [a supplemental insurance costing approximately \$400 per week]."

At another meeting of Teamsters Local 70 the same day, Secretary-Treasurer Marty Frates rejected suggestions from workers that they reach out to Amazon employees for a common struggle, declaring, "you'd be taking your own work away, that's our competition." When a worker asked why rank-and-file workers could not sit in on the contract negotiations, he was told this was "above him."

When workers demanded better language in the contract for workplace harassment, Frates told them to "get a backbone." And when a worker asked if there would be a strike if the contract was voted down, Frates declared: "It's not going to happen. No one wants that."

These statements are in line with the entire conspiracy worked out by the Teamsters and UPS. On July 10, the same day the union released the agreement, it announced an indefinite extension of the negotiation deadline after the July 31 expiry of the current contract to buy time to wear down opposition among workers. At the same time, the Teamsters has slandered

opposition to the contract as the work of “internet trolls.”

It is necessary to call organizations, like all other things, by their real names. An organization that demands that workers work harder for less to boost company profits, that sabotages strikes, that threatens workers and their families into voting for a contract that will take more from them, that opposes uniting with workers at other employers, and that conspires with the company on a daily basis to carry all of this out, cannot be called a “workers’ organization.” It is an organization of scabs and a cheap labor contractor.

The Teamsters is just one example of the role played by the trade unions internationally. For the past thirty years they have suppressed every struggle by workers, reducing strike activity to historically unprecedented levels, and facilitating a continuous transfer of wealth from the working class to the corporate and financial elite.

The very day the union voted to endorse the contracts, UPS management announced its quarterly dividend payouts to corporate shareholders of more than \$700 million. Extended over a year, this money—extracted from the labor of hundreds of thousands of workers internationally—would provide an immediate \$7,000 raise to every UPS worker in the world, but instead it is handed to Wall Street investment firms and the billionaires that control them.

This is the real meaning of Marshall’s remark that UPS “has to be competitive.” Workers must labor in warehouses with no air conditioning, increase their workload quotas, reduce their pay, suffer more injuries—in order that all they produce beyond what is needed for them to survive can be handed over to the rich.

It is impossible for workers to conduct a fight for their own interests while their struggle is under the control of a pro-company organization of scabs known as the Teamsters union. New organs of struggle, rank-and-file workplace committees that are directly controlled by rank-and-file workers, must be elected in the warehouses and hubs so that workers can oppose the UPS-Teamsters conspiracy and take the struggle in their own hands.

Such committees would draw up their own demands for a strike. Marshall’s declaration that the union will not pay out the strike fund makes clear that workers

must demand full control over the strike fund. There must be no more secret negotiations between the Teamsters and the company; all negotiations must be livestreamed for all workers to see.

Against the union’s efforts to isolate this struggle, delegations of workers must be sent from the warehouses and hubs to their counterparts at Amazon, FedEx, USPS, and to other sections of the working class, for a united offensive.

The *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* will provide every assistance in such a struggle. We urge workers who want assistance in forming rank-and-file committees to contact us today.



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