

“The Teamsters is not a voice for us”

UPS workers respond to Teamsters campaign of blackmail

Our reporters
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There is widespread opposition among United Parcel Service workers to the Teamsters’ efforts to browbeat and blackmail workers into voting for the sellout contract backed by UPS management.

It is now more than two weeks since the August 9 national conference of Teamsters executives voted to endorse the sellout contract. The union is keeping workers in the dark about when a vote on the contracts will be held in order to buy time as it seeks to wear down opposition to the agreement and intimidate workers into voting “yes.”

The Teamsters have dispatched officials across the country to threaten that workers will lose their health care coverage if they strike, that the contract is the “best they can get,” and any agreement will be worse if they vote “no.”

Matt, a 25-year-old part-time warehouse worker of one year in Madison Heights, Michigan told *World Socialist Web Site UPS Workers Newsletter* reporters that the Teamsters are “supposed to work for us, but it really feels like they don’t. They work for themselves. There needs to be change.”

He said that “we really have no way to relay our message.” He continued: “We’re talking to the wall if we try to tell them anything. There’s no one to hear us. The Teamsters union is not a voice for us. They say this is the ‘best they can do,’ but the ‘best’ is worse than our prior contract. So I don’t believe that.”

The proposed contract will create a new tier of lower-paid “hybrid” workers who can be shifted between the warehouse and delivery jobs. It also maintains poverty wages for part-time workers.

Matt said he had been watching YouTube videos about the agreement. “I am opposed to it. I don’t like a

lot of the stuff that happens here,” he said. “The majority of the facility isn’t air conditioned. The only spots that are, are behind closed doors, where the people who aren’t sweating away all day are positioned. The only time I feel the air conditioning is on my way out, when I punch out. But sometimes I stand underneath it for another minute before I go.

“They say they’ve found trouble finding workers to work on Saturdays, so it looks like I’ll be working Saturdays for the rest of my life. We used to not even have Saturdays here. The drivers tell me that the position I’m in is where you wanted to be back in the day. The wage was decent. It got to this by them cutting costs, lowering our wages, finding ways to work us harder, like what you see in the current contract with the new hybrid drivers.”

A reporter for the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* asked Matt what he thought about the call for workers to form rank-and-file committees in the warehouses and hubs to coordinate opposition to the contract and turn out for a united struggle with workers at Amazon and other logistics workers, autoworkers, teachers and other sections of the working class.

“We’re the same as Amazon workers,” Matt replied. “We’re linemen. We’re doing the same job. To me I think the union wants to save money for the company and that’s why they don’t want us to unite.”

“I see the teachers’ wages and their work schedule and how they get treated,” he said. “We talked about it a bit here [during the teachers’ strikes in West Virginia, Arizona and Oklahoma]. It’s criminal. These are the people educating. They play the most important role in the world and they’re paid nothing.”

“Truthfully, I really don’t see the downside of

fighting together,” Matt added. “If we’re all going through the same issues, I don’t see why we can’t unite, fight together for what we need—we’re all going through the same problems. Honestly, I feel it’s the only way we can do it.”

Elliot, a driver who is a member of Teamsters Local 952 in Orange County contacted the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* to report on the efforts by the union to blackmail workers into voting “yes.”

“Last week, Patrick Kelley, our Teamsters principal officer, showed up with a business agent and the local president,” he said. “Patrick Kelley was telling us that a ‘no vote is a strike vote,’ to try and intimidate us. A majority of people here live from paycheck to paycheck. It’s a very expensive area.”

Elliot said the Teamsters were “no different from the United Auto Workers.” He continued, “The UAW may be the one being exposed right now, but I believe still that the Teamsters are the most corrupt of all.” He was referring to the corruption scandal that has led to the indictment of top UAW officials for receiving bribes from Fiat Chrysler management.

“The union has extended the mailout of the voting package,” he added. “They are claiming that due to the amount of material they have to print it’s going to take longer to send out the voting packets, but it’s because they want more time to campaign for a ‘yes’ vote. I just got three texts from the Teamsters telling us to vote yes.”

At a UPS hub in San Diego, a worker reported that the negotiations between the Teamsters and UPS were “smoke and mirrors” involving “a lot of backdoor deals.” He said “95 percent of us are voting no.” He continued: “What they do is put stuff in the contract that we only find out about 10 years down the road. They said we wouldn’t have to pay medical, but the coverage we got was worse. Our representation is terrible; it’s all for their benefit.”

Another driver at the San Diego hub told us that “management and the Teamsters are not giving us what we want. After this contract is done, there will be union representatives all over this place telling us how to vote, and then they will be gone. When they gave us this job they said it was a skilled job and now they want to turn us into another Amazon, another crappy job with no benefits. Everything is hush-hush. The union doesn’t tell us anything.”

When asked about the perspective of workers building rank-and-file committees, the worker replied: “There is no union, only us, the workers, and we need to stay together.”



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