

Teamsters head to UPS workers: Don't complain, creating new tiers is "what we've always done"

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In an online presentation over the weekend, the director of the Teamsters general packaging division Denis Taylor delivered a full-throated defense of the UPS concessions contract that will boost profits, cut wages and erode working conditions for nearly a quarter of a million UPS workers.

The brief 25-minute August 25 event was billed as an online "conference call," but no workers were permitted to speak or ask questions in response to Taylor's statements. Workers were invited to leave questions after the call and told that the answers would be published later through Teamsters "media platforms."

The contract has provoked widespread opposition among rank-and-file workers. It maintains poverty-level wages for the vast majority of the workforce, more than 70 percent of whom are part-time and can start out earning as little as \$10 per hour in the warehouses. Most of these workers are forced to work second jobs to make ends meet.

The agreement also creates a new tier of "hybrid" driver/warehouse workers, who earn up to \$6 per hour less than current drivers, can be forced to work on Sundays, and can be shifted between driving and warehouse work. This will be used to not only destroy higher-paid driving jobs but establish a precedent for extending the conditions of part-time work in the warehouses to the deliveries.

Faced with the task of explaining why this amounted to a great victory for workers, Taylor addressed what he called workers' "hang-ups" about the contract. Among these was the "misnomer that we are creating a classification of employees that creates a two-tier system of drivers with this company."

This was wrong, he said, because "we have had a two-tier system at UPS for a very, very long time." The new "hybrid" position will not be a second tier, in other words, but a third one.

Taylor noted that the UPS employs "thousands and thousands of '22.3s,'" a classification of lower-paid full-time warehouse workers created in 1997. For "that second tier, compared to the '22.2,' full-time inside employees, the difference in rate is approximately \$5 per hour," he said.

Taylor remarked that "when we put the '22.3s' in the contract, in 1997, they were not well received" by workers, who "said this was nothing more than a two-tier system." But now, workers have learned to love the lower-paid work they have no option but to accept, he claimed. The "22.3" positions "are very popular," Taylor declared, and "I believe that the '22.4' jobs will be as well."

In perhaps the only true words stated throughout his entire speech, Taylor told workers to not be surprised at the union's sellout, because "it is no different than what we have always done."

Indeed, Taylor's reference to the "22.3" position is particularly revealing in this regard. The Teamsters agreed to the creation of the role as part of their sellout of a 16-day national strike at UPS in 1997. At that time, the new position was presented as a great victory, which would allow part-time workers to obtain full-time jobs, despite being on lower wages than existing full-time employees. Following the Teamsters' shutdown of the strike, UPS proceeded to lay off more than 15,000 workers as part of their restructuring operations.

This experience is especially significant because the

Teamsters was led, at that time, by Ron Carey, who was backed by the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a faction of the union apparatus that presents itself as an opposition to the “old guard” Teamsters leaders, led by current union president James P. Hoffa.

Carey’s and the TDU’s sellout of the 1997 strike is universally presented as a victory by both the TDU and various pseudo-left publications such as *Jacobin* magazine—which is affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America—and *Labor Notes*. An entire mythology has been created around this to promote the lie that the Teamsters can be reformed to fight for workers’ interests.

The TDU does not oppose the destruction of workers’ conditions. It currently controls six out of 24 of the Teamsters executive board, and its aim is to control all the highly-paid leadership positions in the Teamsters. Its call for a “no” vote in the present contract is aimed at dissipating workers’ anger and maintaining the stranglehold of the pro-company union over workers.

In opposition to the TDU, the Socialist Equality Party and the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* urges workers to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the union by electing rank-and-file workplace committees. Such committees should formulate their own demands, including the elimination of all tiers, the transformation of all part-time jobs into full-time positions and a 30 percent across-the-board raise. Preparations must be made now for strike action in defiance of the Teamsters.

Taylor did not seek to explain why an agreement that supposedly improves workers’ conditions has been celebrated by UPS management and its financial investors. Wall Street has responded to the unveiling of the tentative agreement on July 10 by sending UPS share prices up by more than 11 percent. While Taylor is the “chief negotiator” in the current contract, the title is disingenuous, since it implies an adversarial relationship between the company and the union, which, in reality, are conspiring together against UPS workers.

Nor did Taylor answer the warnings made by drivers themselves, that the new 22.4 “hybrid” workers will be overworked and used to reduce the number of hours provided to existing drivers. It was “a misnomer to say that this company will work 22.4 drivers to the death

over the weekends, take our Monday work and lay us off,” he declared. “That is a stretch of the imagination.”

Taylor concluded by warning workers not to trust unnamed groups who were trying “to attempt to get you to turn down the contract. It is the intention of this group and these parties to put you out on strike.”

This is in line with the Teamsters’ efforts to browbeat and threaten workers seeking to oppose the current contract since its release. The union has dispatched its officers around the country to warn that workers will lose their health benefits if they go on strike, and that any future offer will be worse if workers vote “no.” It has meanwhile slandered opposition to the deal as the work of “Internet trolls.”

Taylor’s comments are another demonstration of the fact that the Teamsters is not an organization that represents, or can be forced to represent, workers. Like its counterparts in every country around the world, it functions as an agency of the corporations and the state to cut workers’ wages and suppress strikes.

The defeat of the conspiracy by UPS and the Teamsters requires a break from the union and the formation of independent rank-and-file workplace committees, in every hub and warehouse. In addition to coordinating opposition to the sellout contract, these committees must reach out to other sections of workers, including autoworkers, steelworkers, teachers, Amazon and other logistics workers, to prepare a common struggle.

The *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* urges workers who want to take up such a fight to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact