

Widespread opposition to sellout UPS contract in run-up to Friday vote deadline

Our reporters
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With two days to go until the deadline for voting on the sellout contract backed by the Teamsters union and UPS management, there is widespread opposition among a quarter million UPS drivers and warehouse employees. The results of the vote are due to be released on Friday evening.

Since the contract was released in July, the Teamsters has pursued a policy of lies, blackmail and browbeating against workers to push the deal through. Workers have been forced to work without a contract for the past three months as the union has sought to buy time to wear down widespread opposition.

The union's strategy has been worked out in collaboration with BerlinRosen, the New York-based public relations firm aligned with the Democratic Party utilized by the United Auto Workers union to push through the concessions contract on auto workers in 2015.

The agreement creates a "hybrid" driver/warehouse worker, who will be paid up to \$6 per hour less than current drivers. The position is aimed at ultimately destroying the full-time driver position, and extending the conditions of part-time, low-wage labor from the warehouses to deliveries. Warehouse workers, who make up 70 percent of the workforce, will remain on poverty-level wages. The starting rate, which is currently \$10 per hour, will reach \$15 per hour by 2022, an amount that is not enough to live on even today.

In a shot across the bow to UPS, Amazon announced Tuesday that it will raise the base rate for all 250,000 employees and 100,000 temps expected to be hired this holiday season to \$15 an hour by November 1. The move is an effort by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos to preempt a revolt by Amazon workers against poverty level wages and sweatshop conditions. Under

conditions of a near record low official unemployment rate and competition for labor, Amazon's move could also be aimed at undermining rivals in the package delivery business like UPS.

In an online conference call last month, the Teamsters' chief "negotiator" Dennis Taylor made clear that the purpose of raising the starting wage for warehouse workers was to allow the company to continue to attract and retain a highly-exploited workforce. "Because we have failed to address the start rate for so long, state and municipal minimum wage rates have begun to exceed the contract rate, which has made an already difficult hiring and retention problem worse each passing day," Taylor said.

Taylor noted that the starting rate for part-time employees in 1980 was \$8 per hour, the equivalent of almost \$30 per hour today. Speaking like a true company man, he boasted that as a result of the union's role in cutting the real starting wage in every successive contract "UPS was able to save millions of dollars each year."

But Taylor absurdly declared that the purpose of handing over billions of dollars from workers to UPS executives and corporate shareholders over decades was done in order to "receive pay increases and benefit increases that we otherwise would not have been able to negotiate for our current part-time and full-time members." According to this logic, the Teamsters' executives collaborated with the company to slash the wages of workers in order—to raise workers' wages!

In combination with such pro-corporate lies, the union has threatened workers with the loss of their healthcare coverage if they strike and declared that the next offer will be worse if they reject the current contract.

UPS workers have given statements to the WSWS

UPS Workers Newsletter opposing the sellout and the lies and evasions of the Teamsters. A part-time loader in the San Francisco Bay Area who began working at the facility this year told us that the pitiful wage increase of \$1 per year was “a punch in the face” to workers who “load trucks the way we do.” To live in the Bay Area, he said, “You need to earn a minimum of \$20 per hour.”

The worker had “tried contacting Teamsters to find out when the next meeting is for negotiations,” he said. “They don’t even answer the phone. I think we should get \$4 raise each year for the next five years, or at least \$3. The raise should take effect retroactively to when the old contract expired.

“When I talk to people at work, I tell them we should go on strike,” the worker said. “They say, ‘Oh yeah, we should.’ This strike should have been going on a long time ago. If we’re working without a contract, we should be on strike.” He added that, “It’s easier to fire one or two guys, and rehire one or two guys, but to replace the whole building would be impossible. Somebody needs to step up from each company, and say, ‘This is not right.’”

The worker said he felt “sick to my stomach” that the union was forcing workers to stay on the job after a 93 percent strike authorization vote. “We don’t have a representative to support the workers. We even have a supervisor who goes up and down the line yelling at us.”

Tiffany, a truck driver with 30 years in Oakland, said, “I don’t like what they are doing for the package handlers. No one is really giving any answers, so I don’t know what’s happening.” Tiffany said some of the ballots that have been sent to workers in order to vote online electronically are missing a code, and if you “don’t have a code, they are invalid.” She said the union reported alternative ballots would be available from the union hall to replace invalid ones, but that, “It’s very disorienting and I don’t really know what is going to happen with the contract because it’s so unclear.”

DeAndre, a young warehouse worker in the Richmond facility in northern California, told us that “most people are going to vote ‘No.’ I’m so fed up. There are a lot of long-time workers that have up until this point taken many concessions. There are also a lot of younger workers who desperately need money and

get the job thinking they will move up quickly. But then they quit before too long if they find something else because it’s so bad.”

DeAndre added that the union “tricked us, they’re not telling us straight. Teamsters haven’t been talking about anything, no meetings or anything. Workers know what they need, and they should be running things.”

Ed, a driver in Portland, said he is also voting against the sellout deal. He explained that workers would be hit by this agreement, which only helps the company make money by cutting costs and limiting the number of full-time jobs available. “The second-tier hybrid position is basically a union-busting tactic aimed at pitting workers against one another. And the union is the one letting it happen.”

The WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* calls for workers to reject the deal with the contempt that it deserves. But that is only the beginning. The waging of a genuine struggle requires the formation of independent rank-and-file committees of workers in the hubs and warehouses, independent of the pro-corporate Teamsters union. These committees should link up with workers at other hubs, formulate their own demands and set a firm deadline for a strike. At the same time they should reach out to workers at Amazon, FedEx, US Postal Service and elsewhere to coordinate a united struggle.



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