

As voting for drivers, warehouse workers concludes

UPS aircraft mechanics reject Teamsters contract proposal

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On Monday, aircraft mechanics at the UPS World Port facility in Louisville, Kentucky, rejected a tentative agreement for a new five-year labor contract. The vote by the 1,300 mechanics and related aircraft workers was a blow to the Teamsters union, which was aggressively pushing the deal it reached after four years of federally mediated talks.

The rejection takes place as voting is set to end Friday and a tally to be released soon thereafter on the tentative contract the Teamsters union is seeking to impose on a quarter of a million UPS package delivery drivers and warehouse workers. Rank-and-file workers are deeply hostile to the deal, which would retain poverty-level wages for part-time employees, who make up two thirds of the company's workforce, and introduce a new, lower-paid tier of part-time "hybrid" workers, who could be forced to do both package delivery and warehouse work.

Opposition to the National Master Agreement at UPS has stiffened following the announcement by Amazon that it will raise its minimum base wage to \$15 an hour on November 1. While this is a small increase by the logistics giant, which is competing for workers in a tight labor market, the \$15-an-hour wage is more than the \$13 to which the Teamsters have agreed for part-time UPS warehouse workers.

Announcing the tentative agreement for aircraft mechanics in August, Teamsters Local 2727 President Tim Boyle said it was a "historic agreement," which secured significant pay raises, improved retirement benefits and protected health care benefits. If the deal was ratified, union officials claimed, "Local 2727 members will become the highest paid aviation mechanics in the country by a wide margin." Union

bargaining committee member Jack Chatburn added, "We believe the contract will be ratified swiftly."

While the full details of the agreement have not been made public, the mechanics, who have not had a raise in years, rejected the 3 percent annual pay increases accepted by the union, which are barely above the rate of inflation. A one-time sweetener of 16 percent did not change the minds of mechanics, who have suffered, like workers everywhere, more than a decade of declining real wages.

Workers reported that there were also new out-of-pocket health care contributions, even though the union claimed it had protected "an unparalleled health care package with no premiums."

One UPS worker commented on the Brown Cafe Facebook page: "The rate of inflation is roughly 3 percent. That means a 3 percent raise only keeps you on the tread mill. Do you realize the dividend increase for shareholders is larger than your own proposed wage increase? Sure the mechanics wage is top for the industry, but why would you accept less knowing they are making more off your labor and can easily afford to pay workers much more? Ever look at the compensation mid- and upper-level management receives?"

Another worker posted: "Here's my proposal, this is coming from a 25-year employee. When we make over a billion dollar profit in the next quarter, let's give each employee a 1 million dollar bonus and the company can keep all my raises for the next 5 years. We have a deal? I don't want to get paid for vacation time just to sweeten the deal. Now we are bargaining and trying to have a slice of this humongous pie."

Responding to the defeat of the deal the company had

reached with the union, UPS spokesman Mike Mangeot said, “UPS is disappointed by the vote result. Together with Local 2727 negotiators, we established a generous agreement that maintained industry-leading wages and benefits and provided excellent income security for our aircraft mechanics.”

Neither the company nor the union released the totals of the vote by rank-and-file workers. Teamsters Local 2727 President Tim Boyle did not return media requests for comments after the vote. UPS officials are planning to meet with the Teamsters leadership and the National Mediation Board to decide what steps to take next to try to ram through a sellout agreement.

“This contract is under the control of the National Mediation Board, and we will meet with Teamster leaders and the NMB in the near future to discuss the next steps,” Mangeot said. “We continue to operate under normal conditions, and our customers can count on the reliable service they have come to expect from UPS.”

Louisville is a strategic hub for the Atlanta-based logistics company. UPS is the largest employer in Louisville, with about 21,000 workers. It bases its UPS Airlines division in the city, with two thirds of the 2,800 pilots in its 245-airplane fleet, and it has substantial ground and Supply Chain Solutions operations in Louisville.

The city is home to the giant World Port facility, which is the size of 90 football fields and handles 300 flights and 2 million packages each day, rising to more than 4 million daily packages during the December peak holiday shipping season.

Louisville is also a center of rank-and-file opposition, which the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Teamsters United factions of the union bureaucracy, including Local 89 President Fred Zuckerman, have long sought to suppress.

There is an enormous desire to fight among all UPS workers—aircraft mechanics, who have been kept on the job by the Teamsters for four years since the expiration of the previous contract, UPS pilots angered over being stretched to the breaking point and by company outsourcing to third-party cargo airlines, and hundreds of thousands of package delivery drivers and warehouse workers all over the country.

The Teamsters-backed contracts should all be rejected with the contempt they deserve. But that is

only the beginning. Rank-and-file workers must take the conduct of the negotiations and struggle out of the hands of the company-controlled Teamsters union by electing rank-and-file committees in every workplace. These committees should send representatives to monitor and report on all negotiations in order to end the backroom deals, and rank-and-file workers should outline their own demands to recoup decades in lost income, secure company-paid health care and pensions, and fight for workers’ control over production to stop speedup, job overloading and dangerous working conditions.

At the same time, preparations should be made to link up UPS workers with workers at FedEx, Amazon, the US Postal Service and other sections of workers in the US and internationally, including steelworkers, hotel workers, teachers and others, to prepare a common fight against the giant corporations and the two big-business parties that defend them.



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