

Teamsters head threatens to impose UPS contract even if workers reject it

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Update: On Friday, after the posting of this article, UPS workers voted against the contract, but the Teamsters union has announced that it considers the contract ratified. The WSWWS UPS Workers Newsletter is holding a second online call-in meeting to discuss a way forward for UPS workers to defeat the Teamsters' effort to impose its sellout. The meeting will be at 9:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, October 8. To participate, register here. You can also dial in by phone, by calling (571) 317-3122 and entering the access code 615-917-277.

Speaking at a meeting of local union heads in San Diego on Wednesday, the Teamsters Package Division Director Dennis Taylor reportedly threatened to unilaterally impose the sellout contract on a quarter-million United Parcel Service workers even if workers reject it.

The threat comes as the results of the contract vote are due to be released this evening. The Teamsters union was staggered earlier this week by the rejection of its contract by 1,300 UPS airline mechanics in Louisville, Kentucky.

Taylor's statement was reported yesterday by Teamsters United, a rival faction of the Teamsters union apparatus. According to the report, Taylor referred to a clause in the Teamsters constitution allowing the union bureaucrats to impose the contract if fewer than half the members vote, unless the contract is rejected by a two-thirds majority.

This statement is yet another demonstration of the fact that there is no way for UPS workers to conduct a struggle for their own interests within the framework of the Teamsters union. As far as the union is concerned, workers have the right to vote, as long as they vote the right way. Workers confront not one enemy, but two: the company and the union, which are united against

them.

Since it released its concessions contract in July, the Teamsters has worked to intimidate and overcome widespread anger over the deal. It has forced workers to remain on the job for three months without a contract in order to buy time and wear down opposition. Local union officials have threatened workers that they will lose their health insurance if they strike, and that if they vote "no" their wages will be cut in an even worse offer. In the event that this fails to ensure that the vote passes, the union is now declaring that it will push through the deal anyway.

The agreement, which has been hailed by UPS and its Wall Street shareholders for boosting profits, allows the company to create a new tier of "hybrid" drivers/warehouse workers who will be paid less than current drivers. These workers can be shifted at will between the warehouse and deliveries, setting a precedent for UPS to expand the conditions of low-wage, part-time work in the warehouses throughout the entire workforce. Starting wages for warehouse workers will be set at the poverty level of \$13 per hour—even less than the base rate of \$15 being offered by nonunion Amazon—and not reaching \$15.50 an hour until 2022. This is around half, if inflation is taken into account, of what a part-time UPS worker made in 1978.

The Teamsters constitution states in Article XII, Section 2(d), "If less than half of the eligible members cast valid ballots, then a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those voting shall be required to reject such final offer and to authorize a strike." If a two-thirds vote is not obtained, the union officials are "required to accept such final offer or such additional provisions as can be negotiated by it."

No organization that was in any way democratic or accountable to the sentiments of workers would have

such rules. But the Teamsters union is not a “workers’ organization,” but a cheap labor contractor and a labor-management business.

The absurdity of such a rule is obvious to every worker. Why is a two-thirds majority not required to *ratify* the Teamsters’ proposed agreement, rather than to reject it?

In effect, the workers who do not vote are being counted as votes in favor of the union’s sellout deal. Yet the fact that as few as 20-30 percent of UPS workers typically vote on the contract is an expression, not of support for the union, but the widespread disgust among workers who know that the union is a tool of management that regularly ignores their concerns and aspirations.

In the last contract, the Teamsters bureaucracy ignored the overwhelming defeats of local supplements and riders and after more than a year pushed through the master contract at UPS, in violation of union statutes that prohibit the passage of a national agreement until all local supplements are settled. It was later revealed that the union bureaucracy amended the constitution to simply override the votes of local union members in order to impose the national master agreement.

For three months, the Teamsters has also ignored the 93 percent strike mandate by the membership.

With large numbers of the majority part-time workforce completely alienated from this bogus “bargaining process” it is no surprise that there is mass abstention on the contract vote.

Teamsters United, which reported on Taylor’s statements, has no principled opposition to such rotten and antidemocratic rules. Its report declares, “Taylor claims the constitution requires this sellout. It does not,” and argues that Taylor “cherry-picked a clause” in the constitution, which is “only half the story.”

Referring to the phrase allowing for union officials to renegotiate “additional provisions,” Teamsters United declares, “Our negotiators can return to the bargaining table and win a better contract—and that’s what they need to do if the contract is rejected by the members.”

In other words, even as Teamsters officials demand workers accept a pro-company concessions contract, threaten and blackmail them into accepting the agreement, and declare they will pay no attention to the outcome of the workers’ vote—Teamsters United

declares that workers must place faith in these very same officials to “return to the bargaining table.”

Teamsters United and the closely aligned Teamsters for a Democratic Union are opposed to any genuine struggle by workers. They represent rival factions of the union apparatus concerned with securing control over highly paid union positions and billions of dollars in healthcare and retirement funds. The chief concern of these phony “reform” caucuses is to confine the widespread anger among workers within the framework of the Teamsters and prevent rank-and-file workers from taking the initiative in their own hands and defying the authority of the whole rotten Teamsters apparatus.

But this is precisely what is required. The WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* urges workers to vote “no.” But as Taylor’s latest statements make clear, such a vote is insufficient to oppose the conspiracy of UPS management and Teamsters. To organize a fight, workers should elect committees from the floor of every warehouse and hub, to reach out to workers at other facilities, and make preparation for a nationwide strike, under the control of rank-and-file workers, not union bureaucrats from any faction. Such committees would send delegations to other sections of the working class, including at Amazon, FedEx, among autoworkers, hotel workers, steelworkers, and teachers, to appeal for a united struggle.



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