

Teamsters union defies “no” vote, declares UPS contract ratified

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On Friday, UPS workers voted to reject a sellout contract backed by the Teamsters union and UPS management. The union, however, has announced that it considers the contract ratified and will seek to impose it in the face of mass opposition.

The ballot results were released last night, with 50,248 workers (54.7 percent) voting against and 42,356 (45.74 percent) in favor. Workers at the subsidiary UPS Freight voted by 62 percent against a separate contract. Both votes follow the “no” vote by 1,300 UPS airline mechanics in Louisville, Kentucky on Wednesday, meaning all three of the Teamsters’ contracts have been defeated.

The Teamsters is citing an anti-democratic clause in its constitution that provides it with virtually unchallengeable authority against the workers. The clause states that if turnout in the contract vote is less than half, a two-thirds majority of workers is required to reject the final agreement. Voter turnout on the national UPS agreement was 44 percent.

The Teamsters statement cynically attempts to blame those workers who did not participate in the vote. “As we saw in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election,” it declares, “winning the popular vote does not necessarily win the election when the Constitution requires you to win the Electoral College vote. As Teamsters, we too must abide by the rules in our Constitution. Thus, the National Master UPS Agreement has been ratified.”

Nervous of a wildcat strike, the Teamsters statement threatens: “You are reminded that the terms of the 2013 Agreement remain in effect, including the no strike/no lockout clause.”

In effect, the union is counting those workers who did not vote as votes in favor of its agreement. No organization that was in any way accountable to

workers could have such rules. Why is a two-thirds majority not required to ratify the agreement, rather than to reject it?

From the beginning, the Teamsters has done everything it could to force through a sellout agreement over mass opposition. In July, workers voted overwhelmingly for strike authorization, by 93 percent, a vote that the union has simply ignored.

After reaching a sellout agreement with the company, the Teamsters then dispatched local officials across the country to threaten workers with the loss of health insurance if they went on strike. The union declared that rejecting the contract would lead to a worse deal. It has spent workers’ dues money to hire the marketing firm BerlinRosen to promote its lies. And it has kept workers on the job for three months without a contract to buy time to wear down overwhelming anger over its sellout.

Many workers have raised concerns about the integrity of the voting process. Several workers told the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* yesterday, the final day of voting, that they had still not received their form in the mail providing an electronic online voting code. This is the first year that the Teamsters has used electronic voting on its contract.

Now, to justify its efforts to repudiate the clear will of UPS workers, the Teamsters is claiming that it is merely upholding its constitution. However, in the vote on the last contract, the Teamsters ignored overwhelming defeats of local supplementary agreements to push through the national master contract, violating its own statutes. In that case, the Teamsters amended the constitution to override the votes at locals.

The Teamsters is also refusing to call a strike at UPS Freight, where the turnout was approximately two

thirds of the workforce. It has declared that it will request further negotiations with the company—and will force workers to vote again.

Throughout this whole process, the Teamsters has demonstrated that it is not a workers organization, but an outfit of scabs and strike-breakers. It exists as a permanent conspiracy against the workers it claims to represent.

UPS workers are faced with two alternatives. Either the union will remain in control and impose its sellout contract, which will create a new tier of lower-paid “hybrid” drivers, set a precedent for expanding the conditions of part-time work from the warehouses to deliveries, maintain poverty-level wages for part-time warehouse workers, and give a green light to the company to ramp up speedup and victimizations.

Or workers can take the struggle into their own hands.

The WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* urges workers follow the second course by electing rank-and-file committees in every warehouse and hub, independently of the Teamsters, to prepare an immediate nationwide walkout.

These committees should draw up their own demands as the basis for a strike, including an immediate 30 percent wage increase, abolition of all tiers, the transformation of all part-time workers into full-time workers with a corresponding raise in pay and benefits, a reduction in the full-time work week from 40 to 30 hours, with no loss in pay, and workers’ control over production, line speed and delivery quotas.

There is widespread support for a struggle. Heather, a UPS worker in Portland, told the WSWS last night, “I think the union will try to push it through anyway, perhaps in some kind of quiet way as to avoid pushback. If they do, people are going to get very, very angry and I would expect a strike from workers independent of the union. We definitely need to organize in a substantial way, so we can stay informed and in discussion with each other.”

The votes at UPS are an expression of the growing radicalization and determination to fight in the working class across the United States and internationally. This militancy is developing in opposition to the anti-working class and pro-corporate trade unions. The “no” vote at UPS follows the strikes by US teachers in the spring of this year, which occurred through a rebellion

against the national teachers unions, the nationwide strike of New Zealand nurses, and a growing strike wave by workers across Europe and the Middle East.

These are the allies of the workers at UPS. Rank-and-file committees should send delegations to workers at Amazon, FedEx and the United States Postal Service, as well as to teachers, autoworkers and other sections of the working class, to organize a united struggle, including preparation for a general strike.

The WSWS 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.



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