

After “no” vote by UPS workers, Teamsters bureaucracy declares contract ratified

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8 October 2018

If any more evidence was needed to prove the anti-working class character of the organizations that call themselves unions in the US, it has been provided over the past few days by the Teamsters.

On Friday evening, after workers at United Parcel Service (UPS) voted down a pro-company contract pushed by the Teamsters, the union announced that it was nevertheless declaring the five-year deal covering a quarter-million warehouse workers and drivers to have been ratified. The reason, the Teamsters claimed, is an obscure, antidemocratic clause in the union constitution stipulating that if less than half of the membership votes (the official turnout was 44 percent), then two-thirds must vote “no” for the contract to be rejected.

Regardless of this self-serving rationale, the naked fact is that the rank and file voted down the contract and the Teamsters union is despotically ignoring their vote and imposing it anyway. This action alone defines the organization as a tool of the bosses and enemy of the workers.

As soon as it announced the agreement last July, the Teamsters dispatched officials to intimidate workers, threatening them with the loss of medical benefits and even lower wages if they rejected the deal and went on strike. The workers had voted by a margin of 93 percent to authorize a strike when the old contract expired on July 31.

Workers are now justifiably skeptical about the union’s figures on both the contract vote and the turnout. Many believe that the turnout was higher than the official figure of 44 percent and the “no” vote was greater than the reported margin of 54 percent against to 46 percent in favor.

There is widespread anger and disgust. Workers want to fight against the conspiracy of the company and the union. And a fight must be waged. But this requires

that the workers establish new organizations, their own organizations, organizations they democratically control and use to build up support for and prepare a nationwide strike to overturn this deal and reach out for support and joint action with workers across the country and around the world.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, the Socialist Equality Party and the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* propose that UPS workers form rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, completely independent of the company-controlled union.

The issues facing UPS workers are universal. The vote against the UPS contract—which coincided with the rejection of Teamsters-backed agreements by UPS Freight workers and mechanics at the UPS air cargo fleet in Louisville, Kentucky—is part of the growth of working class opposition across the United States and internationally.

Hotel workers are conducting strikes in Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Detroit, and steelworkers and Los Angeles teachers have overwhelmingly voted to strike. A wave of teachers’ strikes earlier this year was followed by teachers’ strikes in Washington State last month and strike authorization votes in other parts of the country. Amazon workers, autoworkers, health care workers, service workers—all are looking for a way to fight poverty-level wages and attacks on benefits, safety and working conditions.

In recent weeks, beyond the borders of the United States, Ryanair pilots and cabin crews launched strikes across six European countries, workers in Argentina walked out against IMF austerity policies, and strikes and protests erupted in Africa, Asia and Australia.

In every case, workers confront not only the companies, but also the corporate-controlled unions. The teachers’ unions isolated the struggles in different

cities and states, imposing agreements that failed to meet teachers' demands. The United Auto Workers has been exposed for taking millions of dollars in bribes in exchange for ramming through pro-company contracts. UNITE HERE is doing everything it can to separate hotel workers from each other and prevent a united struggle. The United Steelworkers is ignoring strike authorization votes as it prepares to push through pro-company deals.

Over the past four decades, the unions have worked systematically to suppress any organized opposition to the social counterrevolution carried out by the American ruling class. Amidst historic levels of social inequality, the number of major work stoppages last year was the second lowest since 1947, when such figures were first compiled.

In and around the union apparatus, there are many organizations and groups that insist the workers must accept the organizational domination of these company unions. The role of these groups is expressed in the response to Friday's developments at UPS by the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Teamsters United (TU).

Over the past three months, the TDU and TU pushed the lie that a "no" vote would convince the union leadership, headed by James P. Hoffa, to negotiate a new contract. Now, as the Teamsters union tries to pull off its antidemocratic operation, the TDU and TU insist that workers accept its authority. In a groveling statement, TDU officials have urged workers to sign a petition calling on the union's General Executive Board to hold an emergency meeting to "resolve this crisis," and that Hoffa remove the lead negotiator, "return to the bargaining table, and order a contract vote once a new offer has been reached."

The last thing they want is the preparation of a strike and a real struggle against both the company and the company union.

We oppose this exercise in deceit and futility. We urge instead that workers form rank-and-file committees at every UPS location to discuss and implement a program of action. Workers should declare the contract illegitimate and null and void. Independent committees will build support for a national strike to shut down UPS until workers' demands—to scrap the hybrid drivers scheme, turn part-time workers who so desire into full-time workers with full pay and benefits,

and secure a substantial wage increase—are met.

The initiative for rank-and-file committees must be taken forward, not only among UPS workers, but among all sections of the working class. Factory and workplace committees, democratically controlled by and answerable to rank-and-file workers, must be built to challenge the shop floor dictatorship exercised by the corporations, with the backing of the unions. These committees should take up the responsibilities long ago abandoned by the unions, including addressing grievances, opposing the victimization of militant workers, ending speedup and unsafe conditions, and fighting for industrial democracy.

These new organizations of struggle will link up with every section of workers in struggle in the US and internationally against the decades-long erosion of living standards and working conditions, and the immense transfer of wealth to the billionaires overseen by Democratic and Republican administrations alike.

This is a fight not against just one employer or union. It is a fight against the entire capitalist system, which subordinates the needs of society to the enrichment of the corporate and financial elite. That is why an industrial counteroffensive by the working class must be armed with a new political strategy: the fight for the socialist transformation of corporations like UPS and Amazon into public enterprises, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class itself.



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