"It proves they aren't fighting for us but against us"

UPS workers speak out against Teamsters' defiance of their vote

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UPS workers from across the US are continuing to speak out against the Teamsters' defiance of their 54 percent "no" vote on the sellout contract backed by UPS management. Shortly after releasing the vote results last Friday, the Teamsters declared that it was repudiating the will of the workers and that the contract had been ratified regardless.

The Teamsters is justifying its action with reference to an openly anti-democratic clause in its constitution, which effectively counts workers who do not vote as voting in favor, by requiring a two-thirds majority to reject the contract if less than half the members vote. The union claims 44 percent of workers voted—a claim disputed by many workers, with widespread reports of workers never having received their online voting form.

"It proves they aren't fighting for us, but against us," Irene, a 36-year-old porter at the recently-built Ontario, California, hub, the third largest UPS facility in the country, told us. The Teamsters "take our money, but they work for the company."

Irene said that throughout the contract process, UPS managers and supervisors at her plant approached workers and demanded to know if they were voting. "The management were open about wanting us to vote yes," she said. "I've never witnessed anything like it. And why did we even vote? Or maybe the Teamsters just didn't like our answer."

After the Teamsters released its contract, it began a campaign of threats and intimidation to coerce workers into voting "yes." It threatened that they would lose health benefits if they went on strike, and that the next offer would be worse if they voted no.

At Irene's facility, "The union people were saying to us, 'you'd better save your money if we're going to strike.' And I see some of these workers around here who are making $100 a week. You're telling them to save it? What about the strike fund? What does that say about you guys?"

When she went to the Teamsters meeting, Irene said she "had to endure four hours" of a Teamsters official "reading out the master contract" and mocking workers who want to fight.

"They mock us," she said bitterly. "The [Teamsters] Business Agent said, 'I've got a part-timer who wants a wage increase.' And then he laughed. He said, 'I don't get what they want, we already give them pensions and benefits. We can't do no better.'" A few days later, "A UPS manager looked at me and laughed and said, 'you guys aren't going on strike.'" Irene said that another Teamsters agent "said to me, 'we don't want to walk out, because the company is going to lose profits.' So what's the point?"

"Once August 1 hit [the expiry of the last contract] and we didn't walk out, I already knew what the game was about," she said. "They were more interested in helping the company."

Irene's conclusions about the Teamsters union have been drawn from her 10 years at UPS. "When I came in there was the economic crash, which has never gone away," she said. "At the time, I was homeless. My oldest child was three. Now she's a teenager." Irene worked for 10–15 hours a week at below $12 an hour. "For many years I collected welfare from the government because they didn't pay enough. I had to clean houses on the side."

Because she did not have a car, Irene took 11 buses per day to take her daughter to school and go to work. "I saw a light at the end of the tunnel. I thought, 'You

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put enough years in, eventually something will pay off.' I'm glad now I can pay for food for my kid, but I have a husband now and that's really the reason we can do it."

Throughout this time Irene sustained severe injuries to her entire body. "I snapped the entire left side of my body, the ligaments in my feet and knees. I've had carpel tunnel, tendinitis in every part of my body and elbows. I've had infections, all of it from the job. I've given everything here."

Throughout this time, Irene had sought help from the local Teamsters official. "I've called him for help because another employee was terminated for harassment. He came up to me and said 'what the f— do you want? You're wasting my time.' I said, 'I want you to do what I pay you to do.' I said he's supposed to 'work for me. The money you make off our blood, sweat and tears.'"

There are other workers at the same facility who, like Amazon worker Shannon Allen, are homeless today. **"** There are people here who live in their cars," she said. "I know there was a guy who lived in a trailer parked in the parking lot. They bathe in the bathrooms here. I clean the bathroom and see shampoo and deodorant, and I make sure not to throw it away, because I know they're homeless."

"The Teamsters claims they stand up for us, and these people are homeless," she remarked. "They make enough money to buy food and a bus pass back to the shelter, or maybe they sleep under the freeway."

Irene says she is "one story out of an entire warehouse," and she is determined to fight. "I believe in union workers, but I don't trust or believe in the union, because they're not for us," she said. "The guys who are supposed to protect you, to fight for you, work for them. There's no one to turn to. There's no leadership. I'm going to continue to fight for us, for the guys I work with who make $80 a week."

"At my building there's a real heavy circulation of news between the workers," she said. "I make it a point to go to people who are new at the company. Some are aware of what's going on. We make them aware. Nobody I know goes to the union. I don't go to them."

"I agree with these sort of committees," she said, in response to the WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* 's call for workers to establish their own rank-and-file committees at the hubs and warehouses, independent of the Teamsters, to organize a struggle. "What I think we need to do as a whole is walk out. The Teamsters is going around and saying, 'You walk out, you'll lose your job.' But I'm thinking, 'What are you going to do when it's all of us?' There needs to be a system going on outside of UPS and the Teamsters."

"I believe we should form our own groups. What I find interesting, is that if we did something like that, I can already see the [Teamsters] Business Agents and the management coming for us. I think it's absolutely necessary. I see unity between the employees. We've got people with each other's phone numbers sending messages, and on social media."

"We're run by the United States of corporate America," she concluded. "I have to work for all these business people who look at me like I'm trash. I think, you know, 'If we all walked out, you would all have nothing.' So when are we going to do it? I'm ready for it."

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