Ongoing opposition to Teamsters ramming through UPS contract despite workers' vote

Our reporters
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It is just short of a week since the Teamsters union announced it would ignore the votes of UPS workers and unilaterally impose a pro-company deal on over 250,000 package delivery and warehouse workers. Inside UPS hubs across the country, workers are discussing how to stop the implementation of the illegitimate deal, while a section of higher and mid-level Teamsters bureaucrats seeks to prevent a rebellion and national strike.

Nationally, the UPS contract was defeated by a 54.7-46.3 percent margin, according to numbers released by the union. But in several large locals the margins were far higher. In New York City's Local 804, 3,198 workers voted "no," compared to 158 who voted "yes." This was a 95.29 percent rejection. In Local 89 in Louisville, Kentucky, the deal was defeated by 78 percent. Other major locals with large "no" vote majorities included Atlanta, Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Columbus, San Jose, San Francisco, and Albany, New York.

In order to ram through the contract, Teamsters officials have dredged up a never-used clause in the union constitution, stuck in 30 years ago, which says a two-thirds vote is needed to defeat a contract if less than half the eligible members vote. This transparent effort to run roughshod over the majority vote has provoked widespread denunciations from workers. In a desperate effort to head this off, union bureaucrats associated with the supposed "reform" factions, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Teamsters United (TU), have told workers to sign petitions begging President James P. Hoffa to change course.

In opposition to this attempt to confine workers to appeals to the very forces openly defying their will, the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* has advanced the call for workers to form their own workplace committees in the hubs and warehouses to mobilize the opposition of the rank and file and link up with other sections of workers to launch a united struggle.

Jacob, a 23-year-old part-timer in the Portland area, told us that "the union tries to keep us away from everyone else, because as soon as we join up with each other, that's when it's going to blow up into a bigger thing. I've heard a lot from USPS, their workers, a lot of them are getting sick of it too. If we got us, Amazon, FedEx and the Post Office, then that's like everyone. Basically we win. Checkmate. At that point, if we decide just to stop working, eventually other groups of workers that are getting sick of their treatment are going to join in because they'll be able to."

Jacob said a number of his part-time co-workers in the warehouse didn't vote in the contract "because they figured it didn't affect them." He added, "When the contract was being forced, our local stewards and UPS management came by. A lot of people shut up after that, because they were worried about being harassed if they said something critical around the wrong person."

The Teamsters is effectively counting workers who did not vote as votes *in favor*. The opposite is the case, however. Those who did not participate cast a ballot of no confidence in the union, which routinely ignores their concerns and needs. They also know that the Teamsters will pull any dirty trick in the book to impose management's will. Part-time warehouse workers, who make up 70 percent of the quarter million UPS workers covered by the contract, make as little as $10 per hour for as few as three hours per shift, and work in grueling conditions.

Jacob himself started at UPS as a seasonal assistant for delivery drivers two years ago and has since worked in the warehouse as a pre-loader. He makes $15 per

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hour, the minimum starting wage that UPS set in the Portland-metro area at the beginning of the year to address high turnover. He has a three-year-old son with his partner, who is a stay-at home mom. All three live with his parents.

In order to pay bills and establish personal savings for himself and his family, Jacob works overtime as much as possible. During the peak season between November and January, he works shifts that last up to 23 hours. “I go in at 10 pm for warehouse work, get a small break, then help with deliveries all day until 9pm the next day.” On top of working overtime, he also works two other jobs, one as a $15-an-hour caregiver for the elderly and disabled.

“I actually liked a lot of what is being said by the other employees and that they are open about voicing their concerns and putting up a fight.” He added, “I like that you’re [the WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter*] trying to get more workers involved than just us. Trying to get teachers, firefighters... everyone we can get together with us to fight. I actually think that’s a really good strategy.”

He said while union reps and supervisors would attempt to stop any rank-and-file organization by workers, “I like the idea of using social media to create our own groups, so that we can talk to all kinds of workers without fear of getting fired or harassed by UPS management and the union.”

In San Diego, Andrew and Andres called into question the voting percentages put forward by the Teamsters. Both said workers had been intimidated into casting a “yes” vote. Andres, a driver of 14 years, said “warehouse workers inside don’t have all the info, they are getting the short end of the stick because the union gave them no information.” He said the Teamsters knowingly ignores warehouse workers.

Miles, a younger driver also in San Diego, said, “The numbers are on our side, I don’t know how this could pass. They are pulling this line out of nowhere. We should be going out on strike.” Tony, a UPS worker for 18 years, added, “They know we are upset and are decreasing our loads. They’re taking 40 stops off our day to try to butter us up. They are working us nine hours [a day] instead of 12. But the holidays are right around the corner and this new contract is going to force a 70-hour week on us. Someone is going to die.”

Daniel, a part-time UPS unloader, has been at the New York City 43rd Street warehouse for less than a year. He makes just $13 an hour. He told the WSWS, “It’s not fair that we vote ‘no’ and the union went forward with it. We are hard workers and we thought we should get more than $13 an hour as the minimum.”

The $13 wage in New York City does not even cover the median rent, let alone food, transportation and medical care. “I work on the twilight shift,” Daniel explained. “We start at 5pm or sometimes 6pm, and we work 4-5 hours depending on the volume. I get off at 10pm usually. We lift heavy packages. It’s not good for your health or your back. The packages I unload can weigh up to 70 or 80 pounds.”

“We pay for the union with our dues, so they should back us up, including for a decent raise for the warehouse workers. We should get a decent wage. The Amazon raise [to $15 an hour base pay] makes the union we have look like a fool. But our vote doesn’t matter for the union. If that is what they are doing, all I can say is that they must be on the side of the company.”

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