

Widespread opposition to Teamsters' override of UPS workers' contract rejection

Our reporters
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It is now over a week since the Teamsters union declared on October 5 that it was ratifying its sellout contract with United Parcel Service (UPS) and ignoring the 54 percent “no” vote by tens of thousands of workers across the US.

Anger is widespread among workers. A UPS driver in Detroit, Michigan told us that workers who speak about the illegitimate contract are being threatened with victimization by management. Workers at other plants report that local Teamsters officials are telling workers lies and denying that the contract is being ratified, in order to dissipate anger.

In order to prevent a rebellion of rank-and-file workers, the Teamsters bureaucracy is relying on its supposed dissident wing, Teamsters United and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), which is scrambling to keep workers' anger contained within the Teamsters apparatus. They are insisting that workers appeal to the very forces who overrode their vote by signing petitions directed to union president James P. Hoffa and the Teamsters General Executive Board. (See: “TDU, Teamsters United capitulate to Hoffa's override of UPS workers' ‘no’ vote”)

In an effort to provide a pseudo-legal fig leaf to running roughshod over the majority vote by UPS workers, Teamsters is relying on an obscure, anti-democratic clause inserted into its constitution 30 years ago. According to this never-used-before clause, it takes a two-thirds vote to defeat a union-backed deal if less than half the workers participate in the vote.

The union claims that 44 percent of the workforce voted and has cynically sought to blame workers who did not vote for its own despotic actions. But in the week since, charges by workers that management and the union intimidated them and used other methods to manipulate the turnout and vote count have escalated.

This was the first contract in which the Teamsters utilized an electronic balloting system, and many workers have reported having never received their ballot.

Ed, a driver of more than 30 years from southern California, told us yesterday that he had been told by two workers independently at his facility that they had been pressured by UPS management to vote “yes.” “Supervisors were standing by the exit door asking people that worked in their center, holding an iPad, how they voted,” he said. “If you didn't tell them how you voted, they would assume it was a ‘no,’ and say, ‘OK, if you want to change your vote, I have codes for you to change it.’”

“The only way to stop this is there has got to be a paper vote and it has to be people who can count the vote,” Ed said. “There has to be people there from the workers to count the vote.” He added that “we trusted the union” but “I would never count on the union to count the votes ever again. The people I paid to represent me and make sure the vote is fair lost my trust.”

Ed added that he did not believe that all workers had been sent ballots. “I've paid dues for over 30 years, of up to \$93 a month, and they apparently forgot my name and number to send me a ballot. How many other people didn't get theirs?” he asked.

Ed said the Teamsters' overriding of the workers' vote “makes me so mad I can barely speak. The other workers I'm talking to hate it too. Nobody knows what to do, because the group that we have counted on led us down the wrong trail. We pay them our union dues to represent us, but they don't.”

“We gave them a strike vote,” he added, referring to the 93 percent strike authorization by workers at the beginning of July—another vote that the Teamsters

ignored. “They didn’t use it. Then even UPS said after the contract vote that they were planning to go back to the table to negotiate. And it was the Teamsters that said, ‘no, we’re good.’” Ed noted that the Teamsters Business Agent being paid to shove the contract down workers’ throats “makes between \$90,000 and \$107,000 a year,” and “he’s basically a UPS employee.”

The Teamsters has stated that it is renegotiating the terms of five local supplement agreements that were rejected either by a more than two-thirds margin or with a 50 percent voter turnout. It has used the same anti-democratic clause to ratify five other local supplements that were rejected by the membership.

At the same time, the Teamsters Local 705 based in Chicago is working to keep control of discontent among 8,500 Chicago-area UPS workers who are not covered by the national master agreement.

The contract expired at the end of July, like the master agreement, but the union has kept workers divided from the remainder of the UPS workforce and forced workers to remain on the job without a contract. Having waited until after the Teamsters has rammed through its sellout agreement, Local 705 officials are now declaring that they may hold a strike authorization vote on October 21.

Other workers have issued statements to the *UPS Workers Newsletter* opposing the Teamsters’ actions. “I’m 10 years in and I’m still a part-timer,” said Irene, from California. “We make up a majority of UPS. I’ve sacrificed myself to make their money for them. What about us? We’re the backbone and we have to band together. The Teamsters are fighting against us. They’re taking our money but fighting for UPS.”

Another worker from Michigan commented, “It is outrageous. We are busting our butts, running around every day more and more, and we are the ones making money for the company.”

The WSWs *UPS Workers Newsletter* urges workers to take the struggle into their own hands. Rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves and independent of the Teamsters, should be developed at every hub to organize opposition to the contract, oppose the Teamsters’ efforts to impose its illegitimate agreement, and discuss demands and preparations for a nationwide strike.



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