

As workers' opposition grows to Teamsters contract, UPS Freight prepares for strike

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The WSWs UPS Workers Newsletter is holding an online call-in meeting for UPS Freight and Parcel workers on Sunday, November 11, at 4pm Eastern (1pm Pacific). To register, click [here](#). To dial in by phone, call +1 (872) 240-3311, and enter access code: 723-872-717.

With opposition mounting among 11,000 UPS Freight workers to the Teamsters union's efforts to ram through its sellout contract, UPS management released a statement Thursday announcing that it was making preparations to respond to a strike.

Workers voted by more than 62 percent to reject the UPS Freight contract on October 5. On October 25, however, the Teamsters announced that it would force workers to vote again on virtually an unchanged agreement. Workers are due to vote November 7-11, with the results to be announced Sunday evening, November 11.

Both versions of the contract create a new second tier of lower-paid workers by creating a new top pay scale for current "in-progression" workers, that is, those who have not yet reached the top pay rate. The contract does virtually nothing to reduce the widespread use of subcontractor freight drivers, most of whom are forced to pay for their own medical and maintenance bills and gas. And it includes an effective wage cut, increasing wages by 1.7 percent, less than the rate of inflation.

UPS' statement from Thursday declares that "the company has now begun discussions with UPS Freight customers to inform them of the potential for service disruption and the need to arrange alternative carriers." It states that the company will "work to empty our network of freight by Friday, November 9."

This action is intended not only to mitigate the financial impact of a strike, but also to intimidate workers with the threat of a lockout by reducing work

hours over the course of the next week, while they are voting. Workers have reported being told by managers that the company could close its doors in the event of a "no" vote. Some workers have even reported being told by management that UPS is considering shutting its freight service division altogether.

The Teamsters and management evidently hope to force workers to vote "yes" through a combination of threats and intimidation. Many workers have suggested that the Teamsters union is hoping to reduce voter turnout from 66 percent last month to below 50 percent. This would allow it to use the same constitutional loophole it used to defy the 54 percent "no" vote by UPS small package workers on October 5 and impose the agreement over mass opposition.

At an online Teamsters call on Thursday night, National UPS Freight Negotiating Committee Co-Chairman Kris Taylor made clear that the union will do absolutely nothing to mobilize UPS workers for a struggle.

Taylor claimed that the union negotiating committee "felt that the company's last, best and final offer does not sufficiently address the issues raised by the members." Nonetheless, the union would put the agreement to a vote because of the company's claim—made just days after its financial report showed a 20 percent rise in third-quarter profits to \$1.5 billion—that there "is no more money to be had."

Taylor then warned: "There is nothing more to be had at the bargaining table at this point. The company says there is no more. Not a penny, not half a penny." He declared that "you need to recognize that a strike is not a guarantee." While a strike "might force the company to come back to the table and offer more," it was "also a fact that they may offer less. It's also a fact that the company may close."

Having issued these threats, Taylor made clear the union would isolate UPS Freight workers in the event of a strike and not call out workers at the much larger UPS small package division, which employs 240,000 workers. “It is important that you understand that any strike against UPS Freight would only be directed against UPS Freight, and not against UPS Parcel or any other UPS entity,” he said.

Taylor said that if a strike occurs, “The national negotiating committee will determine the date, time and place of any strike activity.” This is a threat to limit strikes to rotating actions at individual facilities, with the aim of demoralizing workers and imposing a defeat.

The union’s actions have only intensified workers’ anger, following the rejection of the contract last month. “We’re getting the short end of the stick,” said Lee, who has been a freight driver in Illinois for 20 years, eight of them at UPS. “It is less than the last contract. It’s a punch in the stomach.”

“I’m tired of the scare tactics the company is spewing out right now,” he told the WWS. “And I think the Teamsters and UPS are in bed together. At UPS small package, they used this two-thirds thing to shove it down their throats. Why doesn’t it take two thirds to ratify it?”

Lee said it was “BS that they’re putting this back to a vote at freight.” He continued: “We already voted it down. For them to tell us to go vote in person at your Local instead of online—I think they’re hoping the turnout isn’t as high as the first time, so they can use that two-thirds thing on us too. I think that’s what both the company and the Teamsters want, so they can say, ‘we got it, good luck guys, see you in five years.’”

He was particularly angered that the Teamsters “keep us separate from the parcel.” When the contract negotiations began, “my thought was we’d go in to negotiate one contract for all, so we would triple our numbers and have a bigger voice. But it wasn’t the case.”

Lee said that in the event of a contract ratification, the company will “have a green light to treat us even worse than they do now.” He described an atmosphere of continuous intimidation. When he and a co-worker asked to be given fewer hours, “they said to us: ‘Are you refusing to do your job? Because if you are I will put you out of service, I will terminate you tomorrow.’”

When he files grievances against the company’s violations of the contract, they are ignored by the Teamsters. “It’s like it’s placed into the Chapter 13 folder, never to be heard from again,” he said. “Grievances are dragged out from six months to two years. What am I paying union dues for?”

Workers cannot place any faith in the Teamsters union, which from the outset of the struggle has conspired with the company against them. Instead, they must take the struggle into their own hands by forming rank-and-file workplace committees in every hub and warehouse, independent of the Teamsters. These committees, directly controlled by the workers themselves through democratic debate and discussion, would give voice to the real sentiments of workers.

They would provide a means for workers to overcome the Teamsters’ isolation of UPS Freight workers by issuing a direct appeal to UPS small package drivers and warehouse workers, among whom there is widespread support for a struggle and opposition to the Teamsters’ despotic imposition of its illegitimate contract. They would turn out to other sections of workers, including at Amazon, FedEx and the US Postal Service, who are confronting the same assault on their conditions, to prepare a united struggle, including a nationwide strike.

We urge UPS Freight and other UPS workers who want to take forward such a struggle to contact us today.

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