

UPS Freight, Teamsters to workers: Vote “yes” or face lockout and lose your health care

Will Morrow
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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.

The Teamsters union and UPS Freight are engaged in a conspiracy to blackmail more than 11,000 drivers and warehouse workers to vote “yes” to a sellout contract they have already rejected. The union and company are threatening that if workers vote “no” this week, they will face a lockout and lose their jobs and health care insurance for themselves and their families.

Workers will vote under these conditions from tomorrow until Sunday. They already voted on October 5 to reject the contract, which will create a second tier of lower-paid workers, do nothing to address subcontracting, and also includes a real wage cut. On October 26, the union announced that it would force workers to vote again on a virtually unchanged agreement, claiming that from the multi-billion-dollar corporation, which is making record profits, there is “no more money to be had.”

The company has issued orders to all hubs to remove all freight from their system. Workers reported yesterday that many warehouses have been entirely emptied and trailers moved away.

At a number of hubs, workers have been forced to leave early or not been offered work yesterday, and up to half the drivers at some hubs are not being offered work tomorrow. Drivers have been instructed to drop off freight to customers, even if it has not been paid for, and when they cannot drop it off, to return the freight.

The purpose of this operation is to blackmail workers

with the threat of a lockout and the loss of their jobs if they reject the contract.

Jane, an experienced driver of 20 years in Georgia, reported to the WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter on the threats being issued against workers by the Teamsters officials in Local 728.

“From the start, they have tried to intimidate, coerce and threaten the employees,” she said. “The Teamsters sent us a note last Wednesday that said that with a ‘yes’ vote we can avoid all of this. It was that blatant. I thought, my god, it is just, ‘You’re going to do what we want.’”

The Teamsters has made clear that if the union calls a strike in the event of a “no” vote, this will not be aimed against the company, but at isolating the workers and imposing a defeat. It has repeatedly declared that it will not call out UPS workers at the much larger small packaging division. It will do nothing to mobilize support in the working class against a lockout and to expand the struggle against the company.

In other words, the union is functioning as a scab organization whose role is to isolate workers, suppress a struggle, and cut their conditions.

“When [Teamsters president] Hoffa came to our local in 2009, he said that if we went out, the small package would too,” Jane commented. “That was all a lie.”

“They are isolating us from those workers who they just gave the shaft, using the IBT [International Brotherhood of Teamsters] constitution, with some clause that has no place,” Jane said. On October 5, the union defied the 54 percent “no” vote among 250,000 small package workers with the use of a constitutional loophole, imposing the agreement over mass opposition. The constitution allows the union to impose

the agreement if turnout in the vote is less than half, unless more than two thirds of workers vote against it.

Jane reported that the window for voting on the freight contract at local union halls will be just 30 minutes per day, in a clear attempt to reduce voter turnout below 50 percent and allow the union to use the same constitutional clause. “Many road drivers already are not going to be able to vote now,” she said.

Jane reported that many workers at her hub have asked the local Teamsters Business Agent whether they will lose their health care insurance if there is a lockout by the company. “Under Teamcare we have to clock in once every five days or else we lose our coverage. They are saying they will not allow workers to use their discretionary days off, which would trigger a clock-in and allow them to keep their health care.”

“The union is telling us that they have to wait for Teamcare’s president to make a decision on this,” she said. Teamcare is the health care insurance system that is jointly controlled by the Teamsters union and company management. The union gained joint control of the fund in 2013-2014, allowing the company to slash its obligations to workers’ health care benefits. In exchange, the union executives gained control of a multi-billion-dollar fund.

When workers ask the local union if their health care will be protected, “it’s crickets and they don’t answer their phone.” Jane contacted Teamcare this week to ask whether workers’ health care coverage would be maintained. “They said they didn’t know anything about it. It’s just another ploy by the International [Teamsters] to threaten us,” she said. The Teamsters similarly threatened small package workers that they would lose their health insurance in the event of a strike.

“Think about it. If you lose your wages, you can get by for a little while by filing unemployment. But for any family, losing healthcare is a disaster: your kids, your partner, your life.” Jane said her co-worker was in tears at work yesterday. “His wife is not well and he doesn’t know what will happen.”

Jane said that over the past 20 years at UPS she has “worked 120 percent since I’ve been here. That’s why I can do all the different responsibilities. But this has taken something out of me. It’s like when you fall down and lose your breath. We work here, it’s a hard labor job. To have the company come after you like

this, and the union to work with them—it’s a position I would not wish on anybody.”

“The company is saying nothing. The union says: ‘wait on the vote, but vote yes.’ The company is telling the customers: ‘This will all be over when we get a signed contract.’ Both sides are telling us how to vote.”

Jane added that for workers “at companies like Amazon, I would not recommend setting up the Teamsters now because of what’s happening to us. I would not recommend being a Teamster or working at UPS.”

If the Teamsters is allowed to remain in control of the struggle of UPS Freight workers, the result will be a rotten sellout contract imposed through blackmail and a gun to workers’ heads. The alternative is for workers to take the struggle into their own hands. The WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter urges workers to take this path, by forming their own independent organization of rank-and-file workplace committees, in every hub, composed entirely of and democratically controlled by workers themselves.

The first task of these committees will be to issue a direct appeal to UPS small package workers to unite their struggle with the freight division and to prepare a strike in opposition to a company lockout. There is immense support for a struggle among workers at UPS, as well as at Amazon, USPS and FedEx, who confront similar attacks on their conditions.

We urge UPS workers who want to take forward such a struggle to contact us now for more information.

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