

“The Teamsters won’t fight for us. It’s not a good contract”

Chicago UPS workers speak out against sellout contract

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Three months after the Teamsters union imposed a sellout contract on 250,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) workers across the United States, Teamsters Locals 710 and 705 in the Midwest are trying to impose nearly identical concessions contracts on more than 15,000 UPS workers despite immense opposition.

The two locals have negotiated separate contracts with UPS since the 1960’s, claiming they get better deals for the membership than the national contract. For more than four decades, however, the contracts negotiated in the Midwest area have closely mirrored the concessions imposed at the national level by the Teamsters union.

Although local officials aligned with the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) made lots of noise about striking during the peak holiday season, both Midwest locals waited to release their agreements until late in December, nearly six months after the previous contracts expired and well past the most profitable period for UPS every year.

The two proposed local agreements are largely indistinguishable from the contract voted down by 54 percent of UPS workers nationally. The Teamsters union imposed the sellout, nonetheless, utilizing an undemocratic loophole in the union constitution. The despotic act provoked an explosion of anger among UPS workers. In response, the TDU-aligned officials in Chicago dangled the possibility of a strike but did nothing to unify UPS workers across the company.

Local 705 covers more than 9,000 UPS workers in the Chicago metropolitan area, including warehouse workers and delivery drivers. Thousands of warehouse workers work for low wages and do backbreaking part-time work at the gigantic Chicago Area Consolidation Hub (CACH), which was formerly a shuttered General Motors Truck and Motors manufacturing plant.

The Teamsters Local 710 union, which covers more than 6,000 UPS workers across the states of Illinois, Indiana and Iowa, is expected to conclude voting by January 11. Teamsters Local 705’s votes are due by January 26. The contract proposal at Local 710 covering thousands of workers, including in economically devastated cities like Rockford, Illinois is also very similar to that of Local 705 in Chicago.

Local 705’s contract proposal with UPS effectively creates a two-tier system of part-time workers. Those workers who have some seniority but are currently earning below \$15 will get a raise to \$15. But their pay will then be frozen for three years, according to a “Letter of Agreement” signed by the local. Newly hired UPS part-time workers will be given a poverty wage of \$13 an hour—less than the wage of a non-union Amazon worker. Workers in the Rockford area have been given a similar “Letter of Agreement” while the rest of Local 710 workers will continue to only make \$13 an hour.

Last October, the Local 705 leadership, including Secretary Treasurer Juan Campos, and TDU member and the union’s negotiating committee member David Bernt, told the pro-TDU publication *Labor Notes* that they would not accept “this \$13 crap.”

“There’s no real protection for us full-time drivers,” John, a UPS driver in the Chicago suburbs, told the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter*. “Part-timers are also getting screwed. There’s no catch up raises for them, especially with the \$15/hr. They’re upset. [Local 705 Secretary Treasurer] Juan Campos said they wouldn’t take the 22.4 [the lower paid hybrid driver/warehouse classification]. What did we get? We got that proposal with the 22.4! We were promised a lot. Now it’s literally nothing that was talked about the meeting is in the contract. It’s the opposite!”

“They told us they would pass a strike vote during peak season. No one ever heard anything about it. The business agents said they would start a committee to see if we should hold a strike and let the workers be heard. If we want to strike, we should strike! A strike is a tool we have to hold the company’s feet to the fire. But instead the Teamsters used the word ‘strike’ to scare us. I personally feel that the Teamsters won’t fight for us. It’s not a good contract.”

Following the sellout of the national contract in October, the Teamsters Local 705 claimed to oppose the low wages imposed by UPS as well as the creation of a new hybrid warehouse/delivery driver category. In fact, the new tentative agreements proposed by Local 705 maintain the very same terms the local union leadership said it would not accept. Local 710’s contract proposal has the new category of lower-paid hybrid drivers as well.

While *Labor Notes* and the TDU have promoted illusions in Teamster Local 705’s willingness to call out a strike during peak season, the local did not even bother to take a strike authorization vote, let alone call a strike. Despite announcing an agreement in November, Local 705 kept the UPS workers in the dark well past late December before sending workers the full details of the tentative contract proposal. Far from mounting any opposition to UPS, they worked behind the backs of thousands of workers to impose concessions that have sparked opposition among UPS workers throughout the Chicago area and beyond.

Rob, a young part-time unloader at the CACH warehouse, spoke out against unsafe working conditions. “It’s simple things, like why can’t we get longer extendos? An extendo is the belt that comes out of the truck so we can unload packages from it. The belt carries the package through the system so that it can be processed. Not all of them extend to the back of the truck, so there’s a big gap in space that we actually need to cover by picking up and carrying the packages to the extend a distance away. A lot of the packages are heavy and it can be pretty hectic. We have to rush, and it doesn’t make sense because it’s a safety issue.

“When I got injured with a shoulder strain, I didn’t realize it until the next day at work. They took me upstairs and tried to make it seem like, ‘Oh, this could have happened on your way home.’

“I said, ‘No, this didn’t happen on my way home, because after work, I got on the bus and went straight home and went to sleep.’ They try to ask all of these questions so they can say that you did not technically do

something properly—so it looks like the injury is on your behalf.”

Recently, at one facility, John noted that UPS facilities were asking workers to bring their own toilet paper. Workers at the Harvey UPS center found that “some of the bathrooms no longer have toilet paper. The company is not allowing management to order any more supplies. This is a right and a sanitary issue. How can they sleep at night? Men and women need these basic things. How can a company making \$7 billion not order toilet paper?”

UPS has made billions in profits by keeping the vast majority of its workforce impoverished, with the aid of the Teamsters. Rob spoke out against the union’s part in the exploitation of workers. “I had no idea what the union was until about six months after starting here. I had no idea I was paying them either. They take between eight and ten percent of every check. I’ve been keeping up with the contract, and I know that the union keeps pushing the \$15 per hour wage increase back. The last I heard was that they are now pushing it back to start in 2020.”

UPS workers seeking to fight for higher wages, improved safety and an end to tiers and concessions can only do so by breaking with the Teamsters and its corrupt, highly-paid union executives that impose the dictates of the company. The experience in Chicago exposes once again that the TDU is nothing but a faction of the same anti-worker conspiracy.

The *WSWS UPS Worker Newsletter* urges UPS workers in Chicago and the Midwest to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the Teamsters and other unions, to link up with UPS workers across the country and other sections of workers, including Amazon, FedEx, auto workers and teachers, to wage a common fight against the corporate dictatorship and for industrial democracy and workers’ control over production.

The authors also recommend:

What is the Teamsters for a Democratic Union?
[8 September 2018]



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