“We’re the ones doing the work, moving the packages and moving the world”

Rockford, Illinois UPS workers outraged by sellout Teamsters contract

George Marlowe
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Three months after the Teamsters union forced a concessions-laden contract on 250,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) workers across the US, Teamsters Local 710 has imposed a nearly identical contract on more than 6,600 Midwest UPS workers in Illinois, Indiana and Iowa.

While the union reported that the contract passed on January 11 with 1,838 votes (66.57 percent) for the contract and 923 against (33.53 percent), there was immense opposition to the concessions proposed by the Teamsters. Of the 6,604 eligible voters under Local 710, only 41.8 percent voted on the contract. The high abstention rate was itself a vote of no confidence in the union, which is seen by large numbers of workers as a tool of corporate management.

UPS workers in the economically depressed area of Rockford, Illinois, were a center of opposition to the contract. The Rockford air hub is one of the largest facilities with more than 2,000 workers. The bulk of the workers at the Rockford hub, as across the country, are low paid warehouse workers that are highly exploited. The turnover rate is also very high.

The *World Socialist Web Site UPS Worker Newsletter* has gotten reports from workers that they did not receive their ballots or were not informed about the contract. One worker commented, “The worst part is more than half voting ‘yes’ had no idea what they were voting on.”

Sheila, a loader at UPS in Rockford, added that “so many of the new hires didn’t even get a ballot.” She noted, “The contract was crap.”

The contract at Local 710 includes many of the concessions that were imposed on UPS workers nationally last October. Last fall, UPS drivers and warehouse workers voted down the national contract covering 250,000 workers by 54 percent. Despite the majority ‘no’ vote, the Teamsters utilized an undemocratic loophole in the constitution to declare the contract ratified. This provoked an explosion of anger among UPS workers against the widely discredited Teamsters.

The five-year national contract maintained poverty wages for part-time workers starting at $13 an hour and created a whole new tier of lower-paid “hybrid” delivery drivers/warehouse workers. The contract at Local 710 follows the same pattern set nationally for UPS workers, while fraudulently claiming more “protections” for full-time drivers. Local 710 also created a separate “Letter of Agreement” with workers at the Rockford air hub. It claims to give workers with seniority prior to August 1 a raise to $15 an hour—a wage on par with non-union Amazon workers, many of whom live in poverty or face homelessness. Numerous workers at Rockford have also complained that there are no catch-up raises for part-time workers who have been at UPS for many years. New hires will still get a $13 an hour starting wage.

Local 710 along with Local 705, which covers more than 9,000 Chicago metropolitan area UPS workers, have both negotiated separate contracts from the national UPS-Teamsters contract since the 1960’s, claiming that the workers would receive a significantly better deal. In fact, both locals have largely imposed similar concessions to the national contracts for

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decades.

Local 710 only sent out the full contract details to UPS workers late in December, at the end of the highly profitable "peak" season during the holidays.

Local 705, which is led by the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) faction of the union apparatus, fraudulently claimed it would go on strike during the peak season. It also kept workers in the dark about the contract details until the end of December. UPS workers at Local 705 who face nearly identical Teamsters-backed concessions as workers in Local 710 will conclude voting by January 26.

Both locals have claimed that this is the "best contract" they could negotiate, following the outcome of national contract. In fact, both unions have long worked to divide 15,000 UPS workers in the Midwest from workers across the country, thereby preventing a joint struggle against the company. While the locals claim there is no more money to be had, UPS made $7 billion in pre-tax profits last year, equivalent to nearly $30,000 per worker.

The ratification of the contract at Local 710 has provoked immense opposition among UPS workers in the Rockford area. Casey, a UPS worker at the Rockford air hub told the WSWS *UPS Worker Newsletter*, "I think we got screwed honestly. No one really ever explained to any of us what was going on with the contract. I voted 'no,' but most of us that haven't been there a year have no idea about what was going on with it."

"If you read the 710 site," said Manny who also works in Rockford, "they were heavily pushing it as a win for us. Now we are questioning what people will be starting at Rockford air hub if it is $15 or the $13 as the contract states."

"Now that this contract has been voted in," said Sheila, "it's a sign to UPS that the union won't stand up for us and will make us accept less than we deserve. We can expect future contracts to be worse and worse. I also followed the national contract negotiations and I know so many were really looking to Local 705 and 710 to take UPS to task. They failed to do that."

UPS workers at other locals also expressed their anger. "We're the ones doing the work, moving the packages and moving the world and we should fight together," said a UPS worker. Another complained that the Teamsters had used union dues to promote the company's contract. "That shouldn't even be legal," he said.

Following the sellout of the UPS national contract, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) along with the *Labor Notes* publication promoted illusions that the union in Chicago would consider a strike to oppose the maintenance of low wages and the creation of a new hybrid warehouse worker/package delivery driver position. The TDU made it appear that Local 705 would mount a counter-offensive against the national UPS-Teamsters conspiracy during the peak holiday season. Local 705 did no such thing and, fearing a rebellion by workers that could spark a renewal of the national struggle, did not even call a strike authorization vote prior to announcing their proposed contract. Workers in Chicago have denounced the contract as well.

The Teamsters, both nationally and locally, are staffed with highly paid and corrupt union executives who often make fifteen to twenty times the incomes of the lowest paid UPS workers. Local 705's principal officer makes more than $230,000 a year. Instead of fighting to defend the interests of the workers, the union works to impose the dictates of management on workers with concessions-filled contracts that keep UPS workers impoverished.

The WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* urges UPS workers to set up rank-and-file committees, independent of the Teamsters, in their hubs and build up a network of such committees across the country. Such committees can provide a genuine means of struggle for UPS workers, to link up with logistics workers in Amazon and FedEx, and to prepare for a broader industrial and political counter-offensive against the dictatorship of the corporate and financial elite.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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