

“The union sold us out”

Chicago UPS drivers angered by Teamsters sellout contract

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Voting by Chicago United Parcel Service (UPS) workers will conclude on Saturday, January 26, on a local contract agreement between Teamsters Local 705 and the giant logistics company. There is widespread opposition among warehouse workers and drivers to the agreement, which is virtually identical to the concessions deal imposed on more than 250,000 UPS workers across the country last year.

Following the Teamsters’ undemocratic imposition of the national contract last October, Teamsters Local 705 kept more than 9,000 UPS workers in the Chicago metropolitan area working without a new contract. Local 705, along with Local 710, which covers more than 15,000 UPS workers in the US Midwest region, have negotiated separate contracts for six decades. Both locals have claimed the separate contract negotiations would give UPS workers covered by these contracts a better deal, but every contract has been patterned on the national concession agreements.

With the backing of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and the *Labor Notes* publication, Local 705 fraudulently claimed it would strike during peak season to oppose the concessions imposed on UPS workers nationally. Instead, the union did not even bother to take a strike authorization vote and kept workers on the job during the busiest and most profitable period for UPS between November and January.

More than 15,000 Midwest UPS workers were outraged at the national vote outcome and were determined to fight back against any concessions in their local contracts. The national contract was defeated by a 54 percent majority but the Teamsters utilized an undemocratic loophole in the constitution to ram it

through. The contract maintained poverty wages for part-time workers (starting at \$13 an hour) and created a lower-paid category of hybrid warehouse workers/delivery drivers.

The TDU faction of the Teamsters claimed to oppose the contract but capitulated to the undemocratic vote outcome. While more than 93 percent of UPS workers nationally had voted to authorize a strike, the TDU urged UPS workers to beg Teamsters President James P. Hoffa to reconsider his decision to override the majority vote. Instead of urging UPS workers to prepare for a nationwide strike to oppose the illegitimate contract imposition, the TDU faction is urging workers to channel their energy into electing a union reform slate in 2021, despite a more-than-40-year history of failed union reform efforts.

The contract at Local 705 was only sent out at the end of the peak season to prevent the Chicago UPS workers from launching a counteroffensive against the concessions made nationally. In October, Local 705 principal officer Juan Campos lied to a union meeting of more than 1,000 UPS workers when he said he would oppose the creation of the new lower-tier hybrid driver/warehouse worker classification. In fact, the contract proposal that was released last month includes the lower-paid tier of delivery drivers that he claimed to oppose.

While the contract claims to offer some UPS part-time workers with seniority a \$15 an hour starting wage (a poverty wage that nonunion Amazon workers already receive), a “Letter of Agreement” tacked on at the end of the contract states that wage increases will be frozen until 2021. New hires will receive a paltry \$13-an-hour wage, similar to the national contract.

More than 6,600 UPS workers in the Midwest were also given a similar contract filled with near-identical concessions.

The WSWs *UPS Workers Newsletter* has spoken to drivers and warehouse workers who are outraged at the lies and concessions of the union.

Bob, a UPS delivery driver who has worked at the company since 2005, said, “I believe it’s not a good contract! It’s just more concessions. There’s a lot of things that have changed as long as I have been at UPS. The company used to match our 401K. We used to have a 100 percent benefit. For this job to be as physical as it is, it’s not worth it. We can die out here or you could kill somebody while driving. With that kind of responsibility, there should be much greater compensation for all of us.”

UPS delivery drivers face immense physical and psychological strain. A study done in 1993 by the Illinois Department of Public Health found that UPS drivers suffered numerous injuries on their job. It noted that “the back was also the most common site of job-related injury with 27.5 percent of participants reporting a back injury.” It also found that these workers suffer “stress related symptomatology that place them in the top 9 percent of the general population for psychological distress.”

The 1993 study also found that UPS workers suffered from mental health illnesses due to work overload, punitive supervisors and a general lack of job control. Apart from back injuries lifting heavy objects, the study also found that drivers frequently received cuts, bruises, abrasions, as well as broken and crushed bones. Conditions have only worsened for UPS workers since the 1990s.

Bob noted the dangerous conditions he works in, adding, “we have to be professional drivers in bad weather conditions. Our managers make us compromise on safety and work faster. I delivered over 400 packages a day during peak season and made 200 stops. The workload has definitely increased and there’s new drivers coming in.”

Bob also expressed his anger at the UPS-Teamsters conspiracy in creating the new hybrid tier of drivers, known as “22.4” who the company wants to use to push out older, higher-paid workers. “We all said ‘no’ on the 22.4 and they found another way to go around the no.”

“They also give us more work and no bonus,” Bob said, while “the current CEO gave himself a raise. We know UPS has the money.” UPS is expected to make over \$7 billion in pretax profits for 2018, the bulk of which will go to shareholders and the CEO. That sum is equivalent to nearly \$30,000 for every UPS worker. UPS CEO David Abney more than tripled his pay in the course of the previous contract, taking a total compensation package of \$12.3 million last year.

“I believe the union sold us out. And our principal officer makes \$230,000 year. That’s a lot of money for a so-called union representative.” Speaking about the national contract, Bob expressed his outrage at the undemocratic vote outcome. “I don’t understand how we said ‘no’ and they still pushed it.”

Like other UPS workers in Chicago, he said, “I did not get my voting ballot! I talked to my union rep about the ballot and I haven’t gotten it still. We need to fight this contract. It’s not acceptable.”

UPS workers in Chicago, the Midwest and nationally are outraged at the sellout contracts and they are determined to fight for higher wages and better working conditions. Such a fight, however, requires the formation of new democratic organizations, rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-company Teamsters union, to prepare for a nationwide struggle of UPS workers. By linking up with other sections of logistics workers at Amazon, FedEx and the US Post Office, along with 70,000 Mexican workers on strike, autoworkers and teachers, a powerful industrial counteroffensive must be built to fight for the rights of the working class in the US and internationally.

The WSWs UPS Workers Newsletter urges workers to contact us today to learn more about forming rank-and-file committees.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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