

UPS workers confront wall of union-company collusion in local supplement fights

Kayla Costa and Mark Witkowski
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After the Teamsters union unilaterally imposed a sellout contract on nearly 250,000 workers at United Parcel Service (UPS) last October, resistant workers are now confronting efforts by union bureaucrats to push through local and regional supplemental agreements.

In addition to the national master agreements for UPS and UPS Freight, workers vote on three regional agreements for the Central, Western and Eastern regions, and twenty-five supplements and riders covering union locals, urban metro areas and state regions. These additional agreements sort out particular details relating to health care and pension benefits, wages, quotas for job creations, vacation days and overtime for workers within these regions.

These agreements must be approved across the US before the national agreement can technically go into effect, though UPS, with the assistance of the Teamsters, has already ramped up exploitation of the workforce and announced a profit-boosting “transformation plan.” Serving as a direct arm of corporate management, the Teamsters union is eager to rush through these local and supplemental votes to give UPS the green light to establish a new tier of “hybrid” drivers, maintain poverty wages for the part-time workforce, and ramp up workloads and harassment.

During the nationwide voting process, workers voted against the following six tentative agreements: Central Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, Local 243 Metro Detroit in Michigan, Upstate and Western New York, Local 804 New York City, and Trailer Conditioners Inc. (TCI). Their rejection sent union representatives back to the negotiating table, only to return with a second offer that workers knew was equally bad if not worse than the first offer.

Since the initial rejection, only the TCI supplement was approved, by a 58 to 42 percent “yes” vote.

Workers voted against the follow-up offers in Upstate and Western New York, Western Pennsylvania, and Metro Detroit, and negotiations are ongoing behind workers’ backs in Central Pennsylvania and Local 804 in New York. However, workers confront the anti-democratic efforts of the union every step of the way.

For example, after workers voted by 65 percent against the Upstate and Western New York supplement, the Teamsters used the obscure “two-thirds clause” in the union constitution to declare it ratified. The clause requires a two-thirds vote to defeat a contract, instead of a simple majority, if less than 50 percent of eligible members participate in the ratification vote. Written into the constitution thirty years ago, this clause was used for the first time when 54 percent of parcel division workers voted against the national agreement last fall.

More recently, in early March, UPS workers voted against the supplemental agreements for Western Pennsylvania and Metro Detroit by 96 percent and 88 percent, respectively. Unable to use the bogus two-thirds loophole, Teamsters executives debated the best strategy to drive through the sellout as quickly as possible.

The faction of the union represented by Denis Taylor, the Package Division Director of the union, and President James Hoffa prepared to impose the agreements unilaterally, using “emergency” clauses in the constitution. Fearing that this would provoke a rebellion, the majority of the leaders on the General Executive Board pushed against this plan and instead suggested the pursuit of the normal strategy of wearing down opposition through repeated votes on sellout after sellout.

Avral Thompson, the Vice President of the Central Region, warned that, “The imposition would violate the

trust and solidarity of our members and local unions,” adding that local leaders in the relevant states have threatened legal action if the agreements were forced through.

In 2013, the Hoffa administration amended the constitution in order to unilaterally impose the supplements and riders after workers voted three times to reject union-backed deals.

The Teamsters United and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) have played a treacherous role by insisting that rank-and-file workers cannot take any action unless it is authorized by the Teamsters bureaucracy, which has repeatedly trampled on the rights of workers on behalf of management.

With sentiment growing for wildcat strikes and increasing support for the call by the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* for UPS workers to form rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the Teamsters, the two so-called reform factions did everything to uphold the authority of corrupt bureaucracy.

At the same time, they claimed the union would be democratized by electing TU and TDU-backed candidates in local elections and replacing Hoffa in the race for Teamsters president in 2021. But the presidency of TDU-backed candidate Ron Carey in 1992, who was elected in a US Labor Department-supervised election, did nothing to change the character of the Teamsters. Carey betrayed the 1997 UPS strike, signing a deal that sanctioned the hiring of part-time employees as full-timers with a reduced pay scale.

Carey was later brought down in a corruption scandal implicating the AFL-CIO and the Democratic National Committee.

As the union continues its campaign to ram through the sellout for hundreds of thousands of exploited UPS drivers, warehouse workers and other employees, the TDU and TU are reprising the same dead-end proposal as they did after the rejection of the national contract, telling workers to send the negotiators back to the table for a “good” contract. This is a fraud. The Teamsters is a business, not a genuine workers’ organization, and it is led by affluent executives who have a direct financial stake in increasing the exploitation of UPS workers and increasing the profits of the corporation.

UPS workers must draw the lessons from this past year and begin to form rank-and-file committees,

independent of the unions, to fight the corporate-union conspiracy and advance the interests of drivers, warehouse and other workers. These committees should link up with the fight of workers at Amazon, FedEx and other logistics companies in the US and internationally, to begin a coordinated effort to mobilize the enormous strength of workers in this strategically critical sector of the world economy. An industrial counter-offensive must be combined with a political struggle against both big business parties and the capitalist system they defend. The aim of such a struggle must be the socialist transformation of the economy, including transforming the logistics industry into a public enterprise, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class.



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