

Teamsters working with YRC trucking companies to impose concessions contract

Steve Filips
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Teamsters officials are set to meet in Chicago Tuesday to discuss details of the tentative contract reached last month between the union and three units of YRC worldwide. Top Teamsters officials, including President James P. Hoffa, are expected to be present.

The Teamsters National Freight Industry Negotiating Committee had previously announced in a memo issued by co-chair Ernie Soehl that a tentative agreement had been reached with less-than-truckload (LTL) freight and logistics trucking company YRC Freight, covering some 24,000 drivers and freight handlers at its national unit and at regional carriers New Penn and Holland.

The old agreement was set to expire March 31, but was extended for two months to May 31. Employees at YRC have been working under a series of short-term agreements that have been brokered between the Teamsters and YRC's various companies for 10 years.

Negotiations prior to the announcement had been slow moving, after initial substandard offers from the management. Soehl stated, "The parties have worked incredibly hard to reach a new tentative agreement in principle. There were a lot of issues, history and emotions involved with these negotiations."

However, in an evident effort to curtail opposition by workers who are being kept in the dark about details of the agreement, Soehl said that, "We certainly got creative, but I believe we got every penny we could have and that this contract will improve Teamster lives."

In a previous update on the YRC-Teamsters negotiations, Soehl warned of the fast approaching contract deadline and the need by both company and union to reach an agreement to avert a strike, stating, "The union believes the pool of available money needs to expand if we are to conclude these talks on time." Soehl in a groveling tone added, "We've offered

significant operational improvements to grow each company in the expanding e-commerce world and addressed inefficiencies that hinder the growth of each company."

With headquarters in Overland Park Kansas, YRC is the sixth largest US trucking company according to the industry publication Transport Topics, and is composed of trucking and logistics companies from different acquisitions and mergers over the past two decades. The companies operate in the highly competitive LTL transport sector, and the majority of the companies in this sector are regional, thus structured so that drivers could be home almost every night with their families. This sector of the transport industry has generally had a larger proportion of its employees tied to the trade unions.

There are 24,000 Teamsters union-affiliated employees at YRC. They had their wages slashed by 15 percent in 2010 when the company faced possible bankruptcy, due to the recession and YRC's formal merger with trucking firm Roadway in 2009. Since then YRC employees have been essentially working without a contract as the Teamsters bureaucrats have granted extensions to the companies. Mike Rettberg, an employee of YRC, on Facebook group YRC NO CONCESSIONS 2019 said of the Teamsters' granting of an extension to YRC, "It's just to give the companies and union time to try and talk us into it. Me?..... I'm not buying it. Must restore the money or shut the doors."

The sentiment among workers at YRC and its subsidiaries at New Penn and Holland trucking has been steadfastly against any concessions. In addition, workers demanded a reversal of the 15 percent wage cut. In comments on Facebook YRC worker Barry Turner wrote ironically about the alliance of the union

and company against workers, “At least there will be a fair and well deserved pay raise at the end..... I’m sure the union and the company only have our best interest in mind..... anyone buying this[?]”

For its part, the Teamsters led by James P. Hoffa, who took in a reported \$400,001 as union president last year, has prevented YRC workers from linking up their fight with UPS and ABF trucking workers as the union seeks to extend the cuts to keep profits flowing into the pockets of executives and wealthy investors.

This past December the company faced charges by the US Justice Department, which filed a Complaint in Intervention claiming YRC had overbilled the Department of Defense millions of dollars for transport services by overstating the weight of shipments.

While workers at UPS and other companies have been making concessions Teamsters bureaucrats have not faced cuts themselves. The recent UPS contract, which was undemocratically forced through by the Teamsters despite a majority vote to reject, demonstrated once again the hostility of the unions to workers. YRC worker Debbie Judy Taylor said of voting on prior contracts at YRC, “They play the game by letting us think we have a say in what they offer [but] the only thing that will convince the company we want what’s ours back would be a strike.”

The idea being pushed by organizations such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Teamsters United (TU) is that efforts to replace union officials with reform candidates can transform the unions into genuine workers organizations. However, the experience of the past decades has demonstrated the futility of such efforts. Ron Carey, elected as Teamsters president with the support of the TDU, continued concessions and proved no less corrupt than his predecessors. Based on their program of nationalism and support for the capitalist profit system, trade unions all over the world have been transformed into straitjackets for workers, continuously imposing concessions into order to boost the global competitiveness of business.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the building of rank-and-file committees by logistics workers, independent of the Teamsters, to mobilize to reject the sellout deal and map out a strategy to fight for their own demands, including the restoration of all concessions and a substantial wage increase. Such

committees would link the fight of YRC with workers at UPS, Fedex and other logistics companies in the US and globally in a common battle to defend jobs and living standards.



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