

“The Teamsters is a company-controlled union”

UPS national contract imposed after supplemental fights

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With the collusion of the Teamsters union, United Parcel Service (UPS) has imposed a five-year contract on more than 250,000 workers that had been rejected by a majority of UPS workers last year. The master contract, which was imposed after the contentious ratification of supplementary agreements, maintains poverty wages for thousands of part-time workers and enacts a hybrid second-tier of drivers that are paid less.

On Sunday April 28, a supplemental agreement in Detroit passed on the third vote with very low turnout in the aftermath of bitter fights in Pennsylvania and New York over regional and supplemental agreements. The agreements covered additional regional issues over health care, wages, quotas, overtime, etc. For the national master agreement to technically go into effect, UPS relied on the Teamsters to ram through the local agreements with threats and intimidation utilized against widespread opposition by workers.

The final unofficial tally of the vote in Detroit Local 243 for the supplemental agreement was 295 for and 121 against. Only 18 percent of eligible 2,256 Detroit UPS workers voted on the sellout supplemental agreement, with many workers disgusted with the entirely corrupt process led by the Teamsters.

“Everyone knew their vote was meaningless. Even if 100 percent voted and voted ‘No,’ we knew it would be pushed through,” said Martin, a UPS worker from Detroit who spoke to the *WSWS UPS Worker Newsletter*.

The previous two votes for the supplement in Detroit were rejected by close to 90 percent, reflecting seething anger by UPS workers against the despotic moves by the Teamsters to impose the national agreement late last fall.

Despite a majority of UPS workers across the country rejecting the master agreement in October 2018, Teamsters President James Hoffa and Vice President Denis Taylor employed an obscure anti-democratic constitutional clause written more than thirty years ago to unilaterally push through a contract rejected by 54 percent of those voting.

According to the ludicrous Teamsters constitutional clause, if less than 50 percent of workers vote, a two-thirds majority is required to ratify a contract instead of a simple majority. Such a clause flies in the face of basic democratic procedures and expose the Teamsters as nothing but a labor enforcer for UPS and other large corporations.

While more than 90 percent of UPS delivery drivers, warehouse and freight workers were prepared to strike last year, the Teamsters sabotaged any effort to mount a struggle against the multinational corporation. The logistics giant made total pretax profits of \$6 billion in 2018, equivalent to nearly \$24,000 per worker. In the first quarter of 2019 alone, UPS made \$1.4 billion in pretax profits.

“There absolutely is a consensus in Detroit that this is a collusionary, concessionary, sellout deal,” said Martin of the local agreements and the master agreement. “The vast majority of the locals in the Teamsters as well as the IBT are company-controlled unions,” he said.

Previously when the supplementals were initially rejected, Martin predicted that the Teamsters would ram it through regardless. “We all feel the contract will be forced through no matter how we vote,” he said. “Local 243 is just attempting to save face. UPS workers are disgusted and fed up with the abhorrent blatant

collusion.”

Martin spoke out against poverty wages, with part-time UPS workers making only \$13 an hour in the new contract, lower than the poverty wages that most non-unionized Amazon workers are paid today. In the 1990s part-time workers constituted a little more than 50 percent of the UPS workforce; today they are more than 70 percent.

Martin also spoke out against the creation of a new hybrid driver/warehouse worker—known by its contract clause number “22.4”—who would be paid far less than a regular full-time package delivery driver.

“We have no protections for current full-time drivers,” he said. “The colluding Teamsters and UPS are in effect eliminating RPCD [regular package car drivers] full-time positions to create lower-paid 22.4 positions. Do the Teamsters and UPS think the people doing these jobs will not want family time and reasonable hours?”

“Volume will be manipulated to Saturdays and soon to Sundays. This in turn will result in extensive layoffs of RPCDs on Monday and Thursday. These RPCDs have no right to work Saturday and/or Sunday in order to reach 40 hours.” UPS is also going to be putting pressure on the higher paid delivery drivers, Martin noted, as they “absolutely are guaranteed 40 hours.”

Hoffa and the Teamsters attempted to ram through agreements in Pennsylvania with more than two-thirds rejecting the supplementals initially, in blatant violation of their own anti-democratic constitutional clause. Fearing complete illegitimacy and potential lawsuits, they utilized other methods to reduce voter turnout in New York and Pennsylvania UPS regional agreements to hasten the imposition of the national contract along with threats of intimidation against workers who rejected the supplemental votes.

In Chicago, Rockford and other parts of the Midwest, where UPS workers have had separate local agreements from the national, similar concessions were imposed in January that mirrored the national agreements.

“It is a race to the bottom,” Martin said of UPS and the corporate dictatorship over workers in the United States. “It’s *The Jungle* or the shirtwaist fire all over again,” Martin said referring to the novel by Upton Sinclair written in 1904, which exposed horrific working conditions for workers in the early part of the 20th century and the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory

fire in New York City, which killed 145 workers.

The clock is being turned back as UPS workers face a company reign of terror, speedups, warehouse fires, and other dangerous working conditions, as well as death.

Since 2012, UPS has also been utilizing its Orion software and Delivery Information Acquisition Device (DIAD) technology to monitor and optimize driver routes. UPS is making further upgrades to its artificial intelligence and technological capabilities to keep pace with competitors like Amazon and to simultaneously surveil its workforce.

UPS workers confront not just the anti-worker Hoffa administration, but also the treachery of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union and the Teamsters United Faction, which have done nothing but promote illusions in the reform of a thoroughly corrupt and bankrupt organization. These factions, backed by pseudo-left publications such as *Labor Notes*, have no intention of mobilizing the opposition of thousands of UPS workers against the company.

Instead, they are seeking to channel it behind the dead end of the 2021 Teamsters elections, to elect a faction of the Teamsters bureaucracy, such as Sean O’Brien who makes \$302,403 in combined salary as an international vice president. There has been more than four decades of failures of so-called union reform with the Teamsters, which have all ended in disasters for UPS workers.

A genuine nationwide and international struggle by UPS workers against the company can be mounted, but rank-and-file workers must build new organizations of struggle, which are completely independent of the pro-company Teamsters and other unions. Rank-and-file committees must be elected by UPS workers in every hub and workplace to fight for an end to poverty wages, the various tiers of drivers and warehouse workers, and for safety and good workplace conditions.

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



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact