

# With 3,000 car haulers ready to walk out, Teamsters sign last-minute deal to block strike

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*Are you a car haul worker? Tell us what you think about the last-minute deal by the Teamsters to prevent a strike. Submit your comments via the form at the bottom of this article, or text us at 567-343-1642.*

Tuesday evening, the Teamsters union announced it had reached a last-minute deal with the trucking companies covered by the union's National Master Automobile Transporters Agreement (NMATA). With workers prepared to walk out at midnight Tuesday, in an action that could quickly bring the auto industry to a halt, Teamsters officials instructed more than 3,000 drivers, mechanics and yard workers to report to work Wednesday.

The union did not release any details of the new three-year deal, although they predictably claimed it "addresses our members' top priorities." In a statement, the union declared, "Details of the tentative agreement will be announced after leaders from local unions meet June 16 in Washington to review the proposal, which is required by the IBT constitution. Members will report to work as normal."

In a video statement on the union's Facebook page, Avral Thompson, the head of the Teamsters Carhaul Division, said, "I know you're itching to know [what is in the agreement] but just trust us, there are videos you're going to see that people are very excited about this deal, and you're going to be happy with it, just hold on a little bit longer, you're going to be fine."

The Teamsters have already begun their propaganda campaign to sell the deal, with any critical comments on the last-minute deal excluded from their Facebook page. Workers reacting to the deal have very different views. "They sure are in a hurry to ratify. They say it's an epic deal. We'll see. We are told to continue to work!"

Car haulers are determined to recoup decades of wage and pension cuts accepted by the union, and improve their working conditions.

A walkout by car haulers would have an immediate impact on the auto industry, which relies on the drivers to transport

new vehicles from assembly plants and rail yards to car dealerships.

The car haulers are employed by Jack Cooper, Cassens Transport and five smaller carriers, including Active, Annapolis Junction Rail Solutions, Flint Rail Services, and RCS Transportation. Earlier this month, car haulers in Detroit, Toledo, Ohio, western New York and other locations cast a near unanimous vote to authorize the union to call a strike when the contract expires tonight.

Rank-and-file workers are angry over the lack of information from the Teamsters, which is holding last minute talks in Romulus, Michigan to reach a new five-year National Master Automobile Transporters Agreement (NMATA).

After the strike vote, Avral Thompson, who directs the union's Carhaul Division, said the union "now has the ability to call a strike if we don't reach a deal" before the deadline. "As we have said from the beginning of negotiations, we will not extend the contract."

The Teamsters have spent decades collaborating with the transportation companies to slash the wages and pensions of workers to supposedly "save union jobs." In the nearly three decades since the last strike in 1995, however, the number of unionized car haulers has fallen from 12,000 to around 3,000 today. Last year, the Teamsters signed a one-year extension to the 2015-2021 national agreement, which included an insulting 1.8 percent wage increase.

A veteran driver who works for Cassens Transport on the east side of Detroit told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "We are hearing absolutely nothing from the union. They send out updates saying, 'We're making progress, the meetings are going to be great,' but we get no details. I highly doubt we will walk out tomorrow. They are going to bring back a TA (tentative agreement), whatever it will be. If we turn it down, they will say, 'That was the best we could get, if you strike, it's on you, not us.'

"Neither Cassens, Cooper or Active can afford a strike. If

we strike two weeks, the auto companies would pull their contracts and force the carriers to close. But without unionized car carriers, a plant like [Stellantis] Jefferson North Assembly would come to a standstill. They will not have anywhere to store their finished vehicles. The plant is so full, they will have new cars coming out of their butts. There is not another company out there that can walk in a plant with 200 drivers and have the lots emptied by tomorrow."

The worker, who has been in the industry for more than two decades, described the relentless attack on workers' jobs and living standards, which has been aided and abetted by the Teamsters union.

"Under our contract, if your company goes bankrupt, you can follow your freight to a new company and keep your wage, benefits and seniority. I worked for Allied and they said they had to cut our pay to stay in business. The Teamsters said Ron Berkle, a billionaire investor from California, was 'union friendly.' They told us to accept the pay cuts to save our jobs. I took a 17.5 percent pay cut for three years, which I calculated cost me \$60-70,000 in lost wages. Families were forced into bankruptcy. Three years later Berkle and the people from Black Diamond [hedge fund] demanded their money back and shut Allied's doors anyway.

"Jack Cooper bought the assets from Allied in 2013, and I went from one dead company to the next dead company. In 2019, Cooper filed for bankruptcy. The company said, 'We'll give you pay raises, but the pension plan has to change.' The company and the union forced workers to vote for it. Now a guy has to work three years to get one good year towards his pension. It's disgusting.

"Even after the national contract was passed, they went to each terminal to get even more concessions. 'We have traffic from Toledo Jeep,' they'd tell us. 'If we don't get a reduction in costs we're going to lose this contract. If you turn it down, you'll lose your job.' The company and union whipsaw certain areas against each other. They use perfect timing and if they get the drivers to say yes, they win. When they get a cheaper rate they'll throw some more beat up trucks to any area. The investors suck out everything, until a company is dead and they send the trucks to a graveyard to rust.

"Cassens is supposed to be financially stable. They've been better to us, but the wages are not there. We've got 1.2 or 1.8 percent raises for the last two contracts. During this time, the non-union sector has caught up to us. The automakers hold the biggest chip. They are making billions with the vehicle prices going through the roof, but they will only pay so much to transport the cars.

"They put the squeeze on everybody. They will close a

supplier down if they don't get cost reductions. Delphi closed in Saginaw; American Axle closed the doors and moved to Mexico. But you're not going to move the car haulers to Mexico."

The automakers and the carriers, he said, "want to strip you of everything. Whether you are UAW or a Teamster member, they say we are their biggest liability. Every time we put a car on truck, they say, the driver is taking a percentage of profits from them.

"But we are not going to let them take anymore. Inflation is hitting us hard. We don't care if the automakers put a cap on costs, we need to live. With inflation at 8.5 percent, we need that much just to keep up with where we were a year ago. We want at least 10 percent and cost of living protection. If they try to put in a two-tier wage system, we're not going down that route.

"We could cripple these plants with a strike."

To conduct a real fight, car haulers will need to form a rank-and-file strike committee, democratically controlled by workers themselves, led by the most trusted and militant workers and committed to fight for what workers need, not what the companies and corrupt union officials say is affordable.

The formation of these committees will create the best conditions for linking up the fight of car haul workers with railroad, auto, port and other workers to prepare joint action to defend jobs and living standards.

**The World Socialist Web Site is a publication for the working class. We urge car haul workers to write in using the form below.**

**What do you think of the contract and the issues involved in this fight? What do you want other car haul workers to know? We will be publishing comments from car haul workers and details on the contract throughout this struggle. Make your voice heard!**



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