

Teamsters leaders endorse sellout deal for 3,000 car haulers, schedule mail-in vote

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16 June 2022

The leaders of the Teamsters car haul division voted unanimously Thursday to recommend a tentative agreement covering 3,000 auto transport drivers, mechanics and yard workers. Ballots will be mailed on June 26 with the vote on the National Master Automobile Transporters Agreement (NMATA) set to be tabulated by July 12.

Union officials hailed the agreement as “the most lucrative carhaul agreement.” But the terms of the settlement do nothing to compensate for years of cuts in real wages and leave workers vulnerable to the ravages of inflation. The contract also leaves in place a host of concessions handed over by the Teamsters in previous agreements.

Car haulers are determined to put an end to decades of concessions and win substantial gains under conditions in which their wages are being undermined by soaring costs for food, fuel, utilities and other essentials. The drivers’ willingness to fight was demonstrated by the near-unanimous strike vote they delivered in advance of the May 31 contract expiration. However, the Teamsters called off the planned strike hours before the deadline and announced an agreement but refused to release any details.

According to a video statement announcing the endorsement posted online, the three-year tentative NMATA contains wage increases of 9 percent retroactive to June 1, 2022, a 5 percent raise in 2023 and a 4 percent in 2024. Officials claimed there were unspecified improvements to the currently existing and absurdly inadequate cost-of-living adjustments, which are currently capped at 10 cents per hour.

Teamsters officials claimed the full agreement would be posted online, but as of late Thursday evening the full details were still not available.

Given that the current 8.6 percent rate of inflation is

predicted to continue or likely increase further at least into 2023, the wage settlement guarantees a substantial further wage cut over the life of the contract. The price of food, fuel and other necessities have jumped far higher than 9 percent, with gasoline costs up 48 percent from last year.

The first-year raise does not recoup the losses car haulers incurred as a result of the one-year extension of the 2015-2021 agreement signed by the Teamsters, which included a miserable 1.8 percent wage increase.

There is widespread opposition to the sellout agreement among rank-and-file workers. This was expressed on the Teamsters own Facebook page. One car hauler, reacting to the reported wage settlement, posted, “Please explain how 9% is good when the inflation rate is more than that. The way I see it basically with the raise we will still be making less than last year due to not even matching [the] inflation rate.”

Another driver commented, “We lost 17% in the last year and this is what you guys are coming up with? 9-5-4 really? Crap contract, if you guys vote this bs in, then I’ve lost all hope in you!”

A driver at car haul company Cassens in Detroit told the *World Socialist Web Site* that living standards were under siege. “Gas and food are extremely high. The government has billions for a war that we aren’t even fighting. At the same time, they’re cutting programs like mental health when it’s needed more than ever.”

The contract modifies but leaves in place the hated Article 22, which permits carriers to pay half the standard car haul rate for loads previously delivered by non-union drivers. In the name of “defending union jobs,” the union has essentially accepted a two-tier wage system, where drivers are paid half pay handling new “union business.”

Union officials routinely blame drivers for loss of

business due as the automakers' shifted the majority of their deliveries to rail transport and non-union companies. Article 22 is designed to increase the profits of the two largest unionized companies, Jack Cooper and Cassens, while increasing the dues base for the Teamsters union.

Drivers are being told to transport vehicles away from their home terminals and are having to spend their own resources and, most importantly, sacrifice time away from their families to increase the profits of the companies.

Under the new contract language workers reportedly have the right to individually "negate" Article 22, and union officials can prevent companies from "abusing" the language, as though the entirety of Article 22 is not an abuse.

Many drivers reacted angrily on Facebook that the Teamsters had failed to revoke Article 22 in its entirety. One driver wrote, "Obviously someone didn't listen to the drivers. You lost a lot of us on that. It's a vote NO. Nice try but maybe they need to listen to us..."

Another posted, "I understand securing work, but they just abuse Art[icle] 22 I think most guys would love this changed more than the actual pay increase ... if I do 2 turns every week I give up \$300 to \$500 per week on Art[icle] 22 loads in my opinion that is B.S."

Another car haul driver stated, "I'm sorry, but I didn't hear anything as monumental as they led us to believe. Article 22 is still there. It's a hell no from me."

The last strike by car haulers was in 1995. Since that time the number of car haulers covered under the Teamsters agreement has fallen from 12,000 to just 3,000 today. Over that period the union has agreed to the steady erosion of wages, pensions and working conditions in order to supposedly "save jobs." During the bankruptcy restructurings of Allied and Cooper, the Teamsters promoted "pro-union" investors who gutted pensions and slashed jobs anyway.

Now after two years of a deadly pandemic and the worst inflation in 40 years, workers are saying, "No more."

The few details available at the time of this writing make clear that this agreement is a sellout that must be rejected decisively. It also demonstrates that the new Teamsters President Sean O'Brien, who is fully backed by the fake dissident faction Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), is just as rotten as his

predecessor James P. Hoffa.

As more information becomes available, the *World Socialist Web Site* will continue its analysis and provide a platform for workers to speak and organize in opposition.

To conduct this struggle, workers need their own independent organizations, rank-and-file committees democratically run by workers themselves. These committees will allow the widest and most open discussion to hammer out a program and strategy to fight based on what workers actually need, not what the pro-company Teamsters leadership dictates.

These committees can serve as the basis for the development of a powerful movement of the working class to reverse decades of continuous concessions and defeats. Networks of such committees are needed to link car haulers, autoworkers, logistic workers, health care workers and broader sections of the working class globally for a common fight against the transnational corporations.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is a publication for the working class. We encourage 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? Make your voice heard!



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