

Widespread opposition by truck drivers to Teamsters' deal with car-hauling companies

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Are you a car haul industry worker? Fill out the form at the end of this article to tell us what you think of the proposed contract and what you think is the way forward in this fight.

Rank-and-file opposition is growing against a tentative agreement reached by the Teamsters union earlier this month with the car-hauling companies. The proposed three-year contract would further erode the living standards and conditions of the 3,000 truck drivers, mechanics and yard workers covered by the National Master Automobile Transporters Agreement (NMATA). Ballots are currently being mailed out, with votes expected to be tabulated by July 12.

Most of the workers are employed by Jack Cooper and Cassens transport companies. The deal, which would run until August 31, 2025, also covers several smaller carriers, including Active USA, Auto Handling, Inc., Annapolis Junction Rail Solutions, Flint Rail Services, Kenosha Releasing, RCS Transportation and TransCargo.

The Teamsters' new supposedly "reform" president, Sean O'Brien, and his negotiating committee co-chair Avral Thompson are trying to sell the deal as the "most lucrative carhaul agreement in history." Workers, however, have a very different opinion of the contract.

The 9 percent wage increase in the first year (followed by 5 percent in 2023 and 4 percent in 2024) is barely above the rate of inflation of 8.6 percent. It fails to address the cut in real income contained in the union's one-year extension in 2021, which included an insulting 1.8 percent increase.

Cost of living increases, which have been capped at only 10 percent for years, will increase to 50 cents in 2023, with Thompson telling workers at a recent online forum, "If the CPI (Consumer Price Index) continues to rise at this pace, we can also renegotiate a wage increase in the new contract..."

Most infuriating for workers is that the deal retains several of the most egregious givebacks which the Teamsters helped wealthy corporate raiders extort from workers during the bankruptcy restructurings of several carriers over the last 15 years, including Jack Cooper (2019) and the now defunct Allied (2006).

The deal retains no serious changes to the hated Article 22 on "New Business," which allows carriers to pay drivers half the normal rate for loads if a non-union carrier had done that

business a year ago. The deal also includes no changes to Article 48, which forces drivers doing pick-ups away from their local hubs to accept the lowest-paying and most difficult loads.

A rebellion is developing among growing numbers of workers against the below-inflation raises and miserable conditions enforced by the pro-corporate trade unions. On Monday, Ventra Evert auto parts workers in Michigan overwhelmingly defeated a concessions contract backed by the United Auto Workers, voting to reject it by 95 percent.

"There has been huge opposition to this contract from the get-go"

A veteran car hauler who works for Cassens in Detroit explained the significance of these articles and why workers planned to vote against the contract. We are protecting the worker against retaliation from the company and the Teamsters by referring to him by the pseudonym "Fred."

"There has been huge opposition to this contract from the get-go. We are paid by the load and per mile, and the road guys want to overturn Article 22 and completely get rid of this half-rate business.

"Two or three contracts ago, the companies tried to push a two-tier wage system and we said absolutely no. But with Article 22, they got the two-tier system anyway, with drivers forced to take half-pay for 'new union business.' The carriers have been abusing this. The company can bid for some business previously done by a non-union company. If they don't want it, they can give it back. Then in two or three years, they can rebid for it at the lower rate again. It's not new business, it's just half-rate pay for us."

The deal also leaves intact, with no changes, Article 48 "Utilization of Equipment" of the national master agreement. The clause begins, "The Unions recognize the need of the Employers to obtain maximum utilization of equipment." It continues: "Where work is slow at a driver's home terminal, he/she can be required to deadhead [drive an empty trailer] to

another terminal on single trip basis.”

If there is no load ready to be delivered “in the general direction of his/her home terminal,” the “driver shall be required to pick a trip away from the direction of the home terminal provided that trip has been made available to the drivers in the dispatching terminal and further provided that any subsequent trip is in the direction of his home terminal.”

Fred explained: “The biggest issue is Article 48. The company wants to send drivers in the opposite direction of the home terminal, keeping you gone for a week. Currently, you pick from home and return in the direction back home. We won’t be gypsies!

“Once the parts are installed, the automakers want 4,000 vehicles moved yesterday”

“Because of the parts shortages, the auto companies have been stocking up unfinished vehicles in their storage lots. Once the parts are installed, these lots become ‘hot-spots’ and the automakers want 4,000 vehicles moved yesterday. There is no way the local hubs can handle this, so they send guys from out-of-state terminals. The outside guys go to the bottom of the board when they pick their loads, no matter what their seniority, because the home guys pick first.

“This means you can miss out on deliveries to the closest dealerships, the best loading pay and other advantages. If you load and drop off deliveries quickly, the better off you are.

“We are cheated with mileage pay because it is from zip code to zip code, but a dealership can be at the far reaches of an area. They can tell you the drop is 189 miles, but it turns out to be 230 miles. When you are on the bottom of the board you get the worst loads. When you have seniority and you are working out of your home domicile, you can have six pickup trucks going to the same dealership. If you travel to go to an out-of-state terminal, you might have to deliver those same six pickups to six different dealerships.

“Article 48 allows the driver to break the new business rate if he chooses to be a gypsy all week. Most drivers want to return home.

“It is very abusive work. You need to get to the dealerships before they close at 5 p.m., otherwise you have to wait overnight.

“Sometimes you get hung up in a traffic jam. Your body hurts riding in this rough piece of equipment. The old guys can’t take this anymore. For the new guys, if you’re sent to St. Louis, Louisville or some new terminal, you don’t have a clue where the dealerships are, where the low bridges are that you can hit, and get yourself fired, and other things. They can get stuck on the road for days getting paid least for the worst loads.

“They added Articles 22 and 48 when there were thousands of guys laid off. Now the companies are making profits hand-over-fist and the trucking companies are trying to hire any driver they can get. This TA will cost us more in the long run. The union is trying to sell this 9 percent raise as ‘the biggest raise you’ve ever seen,’ but it’s only taking us back to ground zero with inflation. Then on top of that all new business gained is half rate. No thanks!

“I work hard to be damage free for 14-hour shifts every day. I’d like to be at home with my family, not out in another town making the company money while I go broke and struggling.

“This contract is going to get shot down and we are going to strike. The union told us they wouldn’t go back to the table. If we reject it, they say, we will be on strike. They’re threatening workers, saying Jack Cooper won’t last 72 hours and will go bankrupt if we strike. But we have to do what we have to do, for us and the next generation. This is ridiculous. We’re bring sold out. Everywhere there are two-tier wages. In the auto plants, in the grocery store chains, workers are getting less and less, and the gap is widening between the rich and poor. We need to fight this.”

Form rank-and-file committees to organize the fight back

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges car haulers to campaign for a rejection of this contract and prepare for strike action now.

At the same time, workers must be on guard against efforts by the Teamsters to manipulate the vote and ram through this sellout like it did to UPS workers in 2018, declaring the contract “ratified” despite the majority of workers voting against it.

The WSWS will assist workers in establishing rank-and-file committees to outline and fight for their own demands, including a 20 percent inflation-busting raise, full cost-of-living protection, and the abolition of the slave labor Articles 22 and 48. These committees will also link up with auto and auto parts workers, airline workers, steelworkers, health care workers and educators, all of whom are seeking to fight back against rapidly deteriorating pay and working conditions.



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