

California Amazon delivery contractors vote to join the Teamsters as Amazon announces canceling of their contract

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Work at Battle-Tested Strategies or another Amazon DSP? Tell us what you think about Amazon's decision to cancel the contract, and what you think should be done about it. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Delivery drivers employed by an Amazon delivery contractor in Southern California have joined Teamsters Local 396 after their employer recognized their right to organize, the Teamsters announced Monday. The 84 contractors work for Battle-Tested Strategies (BTS), an Amazon Delivery Service Partner (DSP) contracting out of the DAX8 facility.

Amazon responded to the announcement by declaring it had ended its contract with BTS. "This particular third party company had a track record of failing to perform and had been notified of its termination for poor performance well before today's announcement," stated Amazon spokesperson Eileen Hards.

BTS workers held a rally at the DAX8 facility Monday in order to pressure the corporation to recognize their new bargaining representatives. "We want fair pay and safe jobs to be able to provide food for our families. We want to know we will make it home to our families at night after delivering Amazon packages in the extreme heat," stated BTS worker Rajpal Singh at the rally.

The Teamsters were immediately recognized by BTS owner Jonathon Ervin because the contractor hoped it would force "Amazon to address his drivers' concerns about heat and vehicle safety," the *Washington Post* wrote. According to the union, workers will vote on a contract "in the coming weeks."

Amazon employs thousands of private contractors as part of its Delivery Service Partners program. A 2021 CNN report said, "DSPs have about 20-40 vans and up

to 100 employees. The DSP program has expanded to nine countries, creating 158,000 jobs at 2,500 DSPs, according to Amazon."

According to the *Post*, "Amazon governs wage floors, routes, delivery schedules, revenue and maintains the right to terminate and discipline drivers" at its various DSPs. In addition, DSPs drive Amazon vans and wear the company's logo on their clothes.

DSPs form an especially exploited section of Amazon's workforce, having worse working conditions and pay than even the company's own employees. The company regularly forces drivers to deliver as many as 400 packages in a typical shift, which can run over 10 hours a day.

The grueling pace delivery workers are subjected to has resulted in well-documented cases where drivers have been forced to relieve themselves in empty drink bottles and worse. A 2022 study published by the Strategic Organizing Center found that DSP drivers had a one-in-five injury rate in 2021, a nearly 40 percent increase in such incidents over 2020.

"Amazon has designed its DSP program such that it can maintain extensive control over DSPs' operations and employees, yet dodge responsibility for the human toll of its intense productivity demands," the SOC report noted.

The vote to join the Teamsters comes amid a growing struggle of logistics workers in the United States and internationally. Several hundred Amazon workers at the company's Coventry, England, facility last week walked out in protest of miserably low wage increases as inflation in the United Kingdom is still in double-digit figures.

The decision by Amazon to cancel the contract for

BTS is a reactionary assault on workers' basic democratic rights and should be opposed by all workers. However, Amazon delivery drivers will not find in the Teamsters bureaucracy the means to improve their conditions. Rather, the union apparatus will work quickly to establish the same sort of corrupt, incestuous ties with management that it enjoys at other unionized workplaces.

In the United States, the contract for nearly 350,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) workers organized in the Teamsters expires at the end of July. UPS workers are demanding better pay, job protections, safety and the elimination of a lower paid hybrid warehouse-driver position, which was imposed against the membership's will in the last contract. The last UPS contract in 2018 contains massive concessions, particularly on delivery drivers but was unilaterally imposed by the union in spite of the fact that it was rejected by a majority of workers.

UPS drivers, in fact, face similar working conditions as Amazon drivers. A 2019 NBC report notes, "[d]espite their union protections, drivers across the country described a culture of intimidation and retaliation at UPS that keeps them quiet even when their lives could be at risk."

During last summer's record-setting heatwave, numerous stories emerged detailing the harrowing situation facing UPS drivers. In June 2022, Esteban Chavez, Jr., a 24-year old driver collapsed and died inside his delivery vehicle as temperatures reached into the triple digits in the van. These conditions have been routinely ignored by the Teamsters leaders, who continue to allow UPS to avoid installing climate control inside delivery trucks.

Tellingly, the union has been quiet following Amazon's announcement that it would discontinue working with Battle-Tested Strategies. To the extent that it will have any strategy at all to respond to it, it will be through backdoor negotiations with Amazon and BTS management to try to re-assure them that they have nothing to fear, coupled with appeals to the corporate-controlled courts and National Labor Relations Board. The union will not lift a finger to mobilize the working class in defense of drivers' right to freedom of association because that would undermine the position of the bureaucracy itself.

It is telling that BTS management voluntarily chose

to allow the Teamsters into the company. It is very possible that this is because the bureaucracy has already offered some sort of behind-the-scenes deal to the company, as trade union bureaucrats commonly attempt to do when expanding to a new workplace. For example, the Teamsters in New England allows newly-unionized trucking companies to pay into the regional Teamsters pension fund at a greatly reduced rate in exchange for allowing the presence of the Teamsters.

According to a source who spoke with the WSWs, the new contract at BTS will include a meager 30 cents per hour pay raise starting in May, up from \$19.75 per hour, once the contract is approved. It also will not include a pension.

The way forward for BTS workers is to prepare themselves for a fight not only against Amazon and BTS management but against the Teamsters apparatus. They must organize themselves into an independent rank-and-file committee to ensure democratic control over their own struggle and to appeal for the broadest possible support from Amazon workers, UPS workers, delivery drivers and other logistics workers throughout the country.



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