

With less than two months to go before the deadline, Teamsters bureaucrats still have not begun strike vote at UPS

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Work at UPS? Tell us whether you want to strike, and why. All submissions will remain anonymous.

Less than two months remain before the current contract for 340,000 UPS workers expires on July 31. The Teamsters bureaucracy, in order to quell rank-and-file anger, has pledged over and over again to strike the logistics giant if a new deal is not in place by then.

And yet, the Teamsters still have not even sent out strike authorization ballots to the rank-and-file. The new administration of General President Sean O'Brien, hailed a "militant" and even a left or progressive by Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the Democratic Socialists of America and others, is weeks behind the schedule when compared to his hated predecessor James Hoffa Jr. In 2018, during the last contract talks, ballots were already sent out by May 15. Workers voted 93 percent in favor of a strike.

But five years ago, the bureaucracy did not even pretend that it might strike the company. Indeed, that contract was rammed through by the bureaucracy using a constitutional loophole, in spite of the fact that a majority of voters had rejected the deal.

The delay in the strike vote is intentional. The Teamsters know that the strike vote would provide a focal point for rank-and-file distrust of the apparatus and of the entire contract talks. It would also undoubtedly reveal a near-unanimous desire to strike, which the bureaucracy is determined to avoid at all costs.

Last summer, members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET, which is a part of the Teamsters, voted by 99.9 percent in favor of a national strike. Instead, the BLET and Teamsters attempted to ram through a sellout contract which was

brokered by the Biden administration. When this failed to pass at several major unions, the bureaucracy delayed a strike to buy time for Congress to preemptively ban it, which it did at the end of November.

No doubt the bureaucracy has learned from this experience, and similar back door talks are taking place with the Biden administration to prevent a strike at UPS. Such a strike would be intolerable for the American ruling class because it would not only encourage resistance by workers in other industries, including in auto where a national contract comes up in mid-September, but also represent a serious blow to their plans to mobilize American society for war against Russia and China.

There is a continuing blackout of substantive information from the contract talks, which have been taking place since April. Promised regular bargaining updates consist of little more than occasional pictures of negotiators sitting at tables, and broad generalizations about the subject of the talks, with no concrete information. As a matter of fact, the Teamsters submitted to a non-disclosure agreement at the start of the talks.

The Teamsters already violated their earlier pledge not to begin national talks until all regional supplemental deals were already in place. Instead, they moved on to national talks with two supplementals still unresolved, including the one covering the massive WorldPort air freight hub in Louisville, Kentucky.

According to an update from UPS dated May 26, the company and the union "reached agreement" last week on "operating priorities, the use of technology and in-vehicle cameras—and advanced discussions on many other topics," without providing any specifics.

According to press reports, they have also reached a deal to limit the routing of UPS deliveries through the US Postal Service. Talks were temporarily suspended this past week and will resume next week with a focus on the last two remaining supplemental deals.

Among workers, rumors are swirling about the content of the discussions. One major issue is personal vehicle deliveries (PVDs), an Uber-style system which involves employees delivering packages in their own cars. Unconfirmed leaks claim that union negotiators have already agreed to expand the use of PVDs, prompting a denial on twitter by O'Brien. Regardless, the real content of the talks is taking place behind closed doors, and it is impossible for workers to know for certain what is being given up.

Meanwhile, UPS is continuing to put the screws on rank-and-file workers. The company has terminated 40 second-tier hybrid driver positions and 20 hybrid positions at the Cerritos and Anaheim hubs in southern California, according to a source. It also recently announced it was cutting Friday shifts for the two-day air hub at Worldport.

The response of Local 89 in Louisville, formerly headed by the current general secretary treasurer Fred Zuckerman, was to assert that management has every right to make such decisions.

"I want to assure you that I and my fellow agents are doing all that we can, but unfortunately options are limited," Brian Hamm, business agent for Local 89, said. "I don't have the ability to simply tell UPS they can't do this. No one in our union can." He added, complacently, "This isn't just happening here in Louisville, there are hubs across the country that are having entire shifts eliminated, and members laid off completely." There are no mentions of these layoffs anywhere on the Teamsters website.

"UPS has certain rights under the contract and the law, and one of them is to make changes to their business model," Hamm continued. "That's what UPS is doing. They aren't just shifting everyone to Sunday through Thursday for no reason. They're doing it because they feel there is no longer a legitimate business need" for the Friday shift. In other words, the bureaucracy cedes to the company the sweeping "right" to make significant changes to staffing and shifts, as long as it has a "legitimate business need" — that is, it believes it will make more money out of it.

UPS workers must organize to demand the immediate convocation of a strike authorization vote, under oversight of the rank-and-file. But this in itself is not enough. The entire bargaining process, which began with an NDA signed without their consent and conducted out of view of the membership, outside of the bureaucracy's hand-picked "rank-and-file" bargaining team members, is a sham. Behind angry phrases in public designed to lull workers to sleep, the Teamsters bureaucracy is preparing another sellout.

The urgent task facing UPS workers is for them to take genuine control of the struggle through rank-and-file committees. They must demand the right, first of all, to full information about what is being discussed with management and the White House, what has already been given up and fight for the principle that the will of the rank-and-file takes absolute, overriding priority.



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