

Under pressure from UPS workers, Teamsters bureaucracy announces hastily-organized strike vote

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If you're a UPS worker, we want to hear from you! Tell us what you think about the snap strike vote. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On Monday, after weeks of unexplained delays, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters finally announced a snap strike authorization vote at UPS. The vote comes amid significant and growing anger among the rank and file, who are eager to fight against the logistics giant and frustrated by bureaucratic stalling.

The vote appears to be hastily organized, with final results to be reported on June 16, only 11 days after the announcement of the ballot. There will be no voting packets sent out to the membership from the national headquarters. That would have cost the bureaucracy, which controls \$460 million in assets, several hundred thousand to a few million dollars to send to all 340,000 unionized UPS workers. Instead, voting will “be conducted in-person at local union halls, at the gates, and inside UPS facilities.” The exact method of voting appears to be left up to individual locals.

According to sources, however, local Teamster officials were not even informed in advance of the strike vote, with many discovering that it was taking place only when they read the public announcement or were informed by workers.

At the same time, sections of the the Teamster bureaucracy are using the occasion of the vote for shameless self-promotion. One email sent out to UPS workers declared: “Celebrate the strike authorization vote in style with ‘Ready to Strike’ gear from UPS Teamsters United [a caucus linked to Teamsters for a Democratic Union, a “reform” group which is a key constituency for the current union administration]. ‘Ready to Strike’ hoodies and t-shirts are on sale through the end of the strike vote on June 16. Get your Ready to Strike Hoodie for just \$24.99. That’s 50% off! Order a ‘Ready to Strike T-Shirt’ for just \$15. That’s \$10 off!”

The rapid and disorganized character of the vote, with in-person voting only, guarantees that the turnout will be artificially deflated. Adequate time will not be provided for all members to be alerted to the vote.

Voting will be restricted to one or two days, or even a few hours, in some locals. Local 952 in Southern California will hold its vote next Tuesday and Wednesday. Local 455 in Denver will allow workers to vote on Sunday only, between 8 am and 3 pm. Local 162 in Portland, Oregon is allowing workers only two hours to

vote, from 8 to 10 am, on each of Saturday and Sunday morning. That local headed by current Western Region VP and UPS Western Package Chair Mark Davison.

The belated announcement prompted angry responses from workers. “Waited so long to get strike authorization votes, [and now] he’s forcing people to have to go to their local unions to vote for this,” one wrote on social media. “So people are gonna have to disrupt their schedule because he ... didn’t just mail the strike authorization out sooner. Some people rely on public transportation, or 30 minutes to 2 hours away from their local.”

The manner in which the vote is being conducted is a serious warning to workers. If matters are left in the hands of the Teamsters bureaucracy, the only possible result will be another sellout contract. If there is to be a fight, it will have to be organized by UPS workers themselves, in alliance with workers at other logistics companies and other industries across the country.

The empty rhetoric that Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien and the Teamsters bureaucracy have used for months, pledging to strike UPS if a new deal is not in place by July 31 when the current deal expires, stands exposed. In reality, they are not even doing the bare minimum to prepare for a strike, because the Teamsters bureaucrats are determined to prevent one from taking place. One reason for the rushed, in-person vote is to ensure that the vote itself will not become a focal point for rank-and-file opposition.

By this time in the last national contract talks in 2018, the previous administration of James Hoffa Jr. had already concluded strike balloting. However, the Hoffa administration did not even make a pretense that it might call a strike, and ultimately forced through a contract which a majority of voters had rejected. In subsequent union elections in 2021, O’Brien, a former Hoffa ally who played a major role in the earlier 2013 contract talks, was recast as a militant to capture and divert anger from the rank-and-file.

The endless threats by the Teamsters apparatus to strike UPS, along with militant-sounding denunciations of concessions given up in 2018, are a ruse. In reality, these talks may produce a contract even worse than the last one. In spite of regular “updates” on social media designed to create the appearance of transparency, the Teamsters signed a non-disclosure agreement at the start of talks with UPS in order to prevent information from coming out.

The contract talks take place in the context of a major counter-offensive by the capitalist ruling class in response to a growing movement of workers around the world against austerity. Hundreds of thousands of layoffs have already been announced so far this year by US corporations, and the explicit policy of the Biden Administration is to ramp up interest rates in order to increase unemployment and curb wage growth. Meanwhile, Biden is also working closely with union bureaucrats around the country to prevent strikes and enforce substandard wage contracts. The aim of these policies is to free up resources for Wall Street profits and for war in Ukraine and against China.

As for UPS itself, in spite of record profits during the pandemic, there is no indication that it is prepared to give up the slightest concessions to workers without a fight. Indeed, it has been laying off workers and cutting shifts around the country in an obvious attempt to intimidate workers. The response of the Teamsters to this, to the extent that it has responded at all, has been to meekly declare that the company has the right to change their business model as they see fit.

The delay in a strike vote is also no doubt because the bureaucracy had hoped to have a deal in place well in advance of July 31. However, talks are far behind schedule, with national talks being paused to finish two outstanding regional supplemental deals this week. The delay in the regional deals has forced the bureaucracy to abandon its pledge not to start talks on the national contract until those were already complete.

The bureaucracy may also use the threat of legal and financial penalties to justify further delays. Significantly, the strike vote was not held until after the US Supreme Court handed down its sweeping ruling in *Glacier Northwest v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters* earlier this month. The 8-1 vote, with the support of both liberal and conservative justices, allows for workers to be sued for economic damages incurred by an employer as a result of a strike. This opens the door for UPS to sue the Teamsters if packages are not delivered as a result of a strike, for example.

O'Brien issued a pro-forma denunciation of the ruling, declaring "The Teamsters will strike any employer, when necessary, no matter their size or the depth of their pockets. ... Today's shameful ruling is simply one more reminder that the American people cannot rely on their government or their courts to protect them. ... We can only rely on the protections inherent in the power of our unions."

In reality, the Teamsters could use this as a convenient excuse not to strike by claiming that it would bankrupt the organization. An endless train of similar excuses was trotted out by the Teamster rail unions last year, when they relied heavily on the anti-worker Railway Labor Act to justify their opposition to a strike. When the provisions of the RLA were exhausted in September, the bureaucracy resorted to lies, claiming that workers were still legally prevented from striking, even by the "US Constitution," and citing the threat of Congressional intervention while deliberately delaying in order to buy Congress time to ban a strike.

O'Brien's claim to oppose the government and the courts is absurd, because the UPS talks are essentially a state operation, and the union bureaucracy, including the Teamsters and every other

major union have the closest ties to the Democratic Party. Biden has been heavily and directly involved in every major national contract over the past two years. There can be no doubt that O'Brien, who visited the White House seven times last year, as well as the bureaucracy as a whole, are in regular discussions with the government over how to proceed. Indeed, in a recent rally O'Brien tried to cover for Biden by absurdly declaring that he did not intercede against railroaders.

In a recent statement, the Teamsters even endorsed the debt ceiling deal, which contains massive cuts to non-military spending, and urged its passage. This will have a significant impact on American workers, including many UPS workers, who earn as little as \$15.50 an hour and struggle to meet basic expenses.

The lateness of the vote may also open up workers to retaliation by UPS. The National Labor Relations Act requires that employees give 60-day notice of their intent to strike. If they do not, the company can legally fire them if they strike. The announcement of the strike vote was made only 56 days before the July 31 deadline, and the results on June 16 will be announced with only 45 days remaining. At the very least, the bureaucracy has given itself yet another convenient excuse to delay past July 31.

If there is to be a fight at UPS, it must be organized by rank-and-file workers themselves, against both the company and the pro-corporate bureaucracy. Workers must move forward now towards forming rank-and-file committees, following in the footsteps of railroaders last year, to mobilize their co-workers, share information, discuss and coordinate strategy and fight for the principle of real democratic control in order to prepare for and fight for a national strike.

That is precisely what the Teamsters bureaucracy is not doing and refuses to do. But 340,000 UPS workers, provided they are properly organized and have a clear understanding of what they face, are more powerful than a few hundred well-heeled union officials.



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