

# Teamsters announced tentative agreement with trucking company ABF

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The International Brotherhood of Teamsters has announced a tentative agreement for 8,600 truck drivers at ABF Freight, a national less-than-truckload (LTL) shipping company owned by the ArcBest Corporation. The current contract expires on June 30.

No details about the tentative deal have been released by the union so far. Truckers have only been provided the vague promises that “the proposed five-year contract will provide members with wage increases and improvements to benefits and working conditions, among other gains,” according to a press release from the Teamsters.

Representatives from the Teamsters will meet in Chicago next week to review the proposed five-year contract before sending it to members for a vote. Workers had previously approved strike action with 97 percent voting to authorize a strike.

The tentative agreement is most likely a sellout designed to avoid strike action and protect corporate profits. If the union’s claims about significant gains were true, they would be proclaiming it from the rooftops, rather than withholding even the most general information about the deal.

Speaking in favor of the contract, a company spokesperson for ArcBest said “We are pleased with this successful outcome for our employees, our customers and other stakeholders who rely on us and thank everyone for their continued patience as we work toward full contract ratification.”

The company’s support for the ratification of the contract suggests that the highly profitable corporation is pleased with what the contract could mean for its bottom line. Last year ArcBest made over \$298 million in profit on \$3 billion in revenue.

An important part of ArcBest’s profitability is keeping labor costs down. Automation was reportedly a

major point of discussion during the contract negotiations and ABF truck drivers make an average of \$21.76 an hour, or \$43,000 a year, according to job board site Indeed. Data from Zip Recruiter, another major job board, places the national average for LTL drivers at around \$53,000 a year.

Under the current contract, ABF drivers receive a maximum five cents an hour cost-of-living adjustment each year. In total, the wage increases over the life of the five-year contract amounted to barely over two dollars an hour.

Despite the record profits of ArcBest, they would not have easily given up any wage increase that meets the needs of workers, who are dealing with record inflation. Anything below the rate of inflation will be an effective wage cut for ABF drivers.

The announcement of ABF’s tentative agreement came just day before a strike vote was announced at UPS. More than 340,000 workers are expected to authorize a strike against the shipping giant in voting over the next week, which has been hastily organized by the Teamsters in order to limit participation. The deal also comes amid accelerated talks with Yellow, another major trucking corporation looking to cut labor costs and force workers to pay to boost corporate profits.

The Teamsters are clearly concerned about what a unified struggle of ABF, Yellow, and UPS truckers would mean. Hundreds of thousands of workers on strike across the logistics industry would grind to a halt a significant portion of the United States economy. But more importantly, the Teamsters are concerned that they might lose control of the situation as workers push to reclaim what has been lost to corporate greed as the Teamsters agreed to concession after concession to the companies.

During negotiations with Yellow, the Teamsters complained that they had given up “literally billions of dollars in wage and pension concessions” over recent years. Such a comment is an open admission of the role which the union bureaucracy has played in propping up corporate revenues. The Teamsters’ complaint is not that workers are worse off than they were several years ago, but that they have not been fully integrated into the company discussions over restructuring. Yellow in particular has taken extreme steps to reorganize its operations and escape its \$1.6 billion in debt.

The Teamsters had little to nothing to say of the 2,000 jobs that were eliminated over the winter of 2021-2022, and reportedly heated exchanges between union officials and company executives have largely revolved around Yellow’s attempts to unilaterally adjust the current contract without the involvement of the union, not the threat to jobs and wages that Yellow workers face.

Workers will, of course, have to wait to see what is in the contract. But an old bureaucratic trick to force through even the most pro-corporate contracts is to deny workers their right to read and review the contract before the vote.

Truckers at ABF should demand that they be given plenty of time to review the contract and discuss amongst themselves, rather than being told to vote for a contract that the company is so enthusiastically supporting.

With the upcoming strike vote at UPS, logistics workers are in a strong position to fight back against the corporate assault on wages and working conditions and reclaim all of the concessions that the unions have given away over the years.

The only thing standing in the way of workers is the union bureaucracy, which is desperate to avoid mass strike action.



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