

# Teamsters hold online meeting in response to anger over delayed UPS strike vote

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On June 7, in response to the announcement of a delayed and hastily prepared strike authorization vote, the Teamsters bureaucracy held an online meeting in an attempt to diffuse anger among rank-and-file UPS workers.

The vote was only announced June 5, with results to be reported June 16. The sudden and rushed character of the vote, which will be held over two days in person, with no online or by mail option, angered many workers. The vote comes with the July 31 contract expiration date fast approaching.

In his opening remarks at the meeting Teamster President Sean O'Brien reported that two supplemental agreements are still open.

"Both supplemental committees are still meeting, trying to get to a resolution, but the one thing that was sure that we would clear up at UPS, is that we wanted the supplements done prior to going to national negotiations," O'Brien stated. "Unfortunately, two of them couldn't get done, they're not that far apart and the chairmen and the committees respectively gave us the green light." He did not further elaborate.

The meeting included negotiating and subcommittee "rank and file" members who offered nothing but scripted praise for the entrenched union leadership.

"I'm one of over 40 rank and file members that's involved in the negotiations, and when I say involved, I mean involved," Dean Doss, a feeder driver from Teamsters Local 63 based in Southern California, said.

"They're not just there just to be flies on the wall and see what's going on. They're being asked their opinion on things and how things go," Doss continued. "Each day, sitting back and watching our General President, Sean O'Brien, and our General Secretary Treasurer, Fred Zuckerman, they're leading the charge and taking it to the company."

General Secretary Fred Zuckerman then gave the

official updates on the strike authorization vote, if one can call them updates. They mainly consist of simply telling members to "get everyone involved" and be informed on the dates, times and locations where in person balloting is taking place. Yet, as the WSWS has previously reported, many local leaders were caught unaware that a strike authorization was going to be held.

Zuckerman continued, "The committee strongly urges all UPS Teamsters to vote yes for strike authorization because a credible strike threat is a necessary tool and we must be prepared to hit the streets August 1st." He added, "Not saying that nobody wants a strike, but we need to show UPS that we are not afraid of one."

Zuckerman states that he wants membership to "be prepared to hit the streets August 1," yet he glosses over the fact that the reactionary National Labor Relations Acts required that employers receive a 60-day notice from employees on their intent to strike and that having a strike authorization vote tallied on June 16, only 45 days before the expiration of the contract, will leave workers facing retaliation from UPS unless they delay the strike past the August 1 deadline.

O'Brien also gave updates on some of the articles which were agreed upon during national negotiations with UPS.

One article which stands out is Article 6, Section 4: Technological Change. O'Brien states that "This is a very, very important article. It's new language that prevents the introduction of drones, driver-less vehicles, platooning or shipping for the duration of this contract without bargaining on such technology with the union. *This supreme order would require UPS to meet with the Teamsters at least 45 days before any proposed change in technology.*" [italics added]

In other words, the Teamsters will allow UPS to automate facilities, which will lead to layoffs, pay cuts, lower staff ratios and higher speedups, just as long as they

notify the union 45 days ahead of time.

Another section worth looking into is Article 6, Section 6: Technology Discipline, which states, “Driver facing sensors will only be used to train new drivers and cannot be used for discipline,” but then states, “Sensors may not be used as *the only reason* to disqualify an employee during this probationary period in training.” [italics added]

In short, driver facing sensors can be used to discipline employees as long as it's paired with another disciplinary measure.

The tightly controlled Q&A session clearly demonstrated the deep seated contempt of the top Teamster brass for the rank-and-file.

The first question was asked by an attendee named Jack Flash who asked, “How will the Glacier Northwest ruling affect the UPS campaign?” referring to the anti-democratic Glacier Northwest v. Teamsters Supreme Court Ruling that allows corporations to sue for damages caused by strikes.

O'Brien dismissed dangers this reactionary ruling poses. It opens the door to a situation where strikes are effectively banned, unless pre-approved by management, in other words made totally ineffective. “The Glacier Northwest ruling is not going to have any effect on the UPS campaign,” O'Brien answered, “although it wasn't a great decision for us, it doesn't hurt us, it doesn't limit us, either way.”

“If we do have to strike, we do not go back to work unless we negotiate amnesty in any and all agreements moving forward so we are not concerned about that Glacier agreement one bit,” O'Brien added.

This echoes the same lies that O'Brien made at a UPS rally when he claimed that the Biden administration did not intervene in the rail strike of last year.

In fact, as Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson correctly stated in her dissenting opinion, this decision would ultimately decide if workers are to be considered legally free or “indentured servants.” The fact that O'Brien casually dismisses the significance of this fundamental attack on core democratic rights demonstrates the utter worthlessness of the Teamster leadership.

Another participant, Jason Gutsenger, asked, “Why not mail out the strike ballot? Why is strike authorization being held in person?”

O'Brien answered, “We did a lot of strategizing about what the best and most effective way to get our members engaged and we gauged it by the international election and with elections in the past, people don't check their

mail, people don't go to their mailbox, people don't send it back in,” O'Brien said.

O'Brien then blamed worker apathy for this decision by stating, “We're trying to make it as convenient as possible, opening union halls on the weekends, and as history would dictate, there isn't a whole lot of participation, there's always this ‘I'll get to it later,’ and look, most people don't check their mail anymore.”

First of all, there is nothing “convenient” about this hastily called and poorly planned strike authorization vote, where many part timers have very little free time to come to a voting site, often tens of miles away from their home, on their very limited days off to participate.

Second of all, it is routine for the trade union bureaucracy to blame worker apathy for the concessions and betrayals carried out by the leadership.

In the recently held direct elections for top UAW officers “reformist” candidate for the UAW, Shawn Fein, claimed that worker apathy was to blame for the lowest voter turnout in union history in that election. In fact it was demonstrated by socialist candidate for UAW president, Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman, that the UAW intentionally suppressed the rank and file vote of UAW members, especially for UC Grad Students that were on strike that same year.

Far from being “apathetic, UPS workers are determined for a fight to recoup decades of concessions surrendered by the Teamster bureaucracy. The World Socialist Web Site encourages the largest vote possible in favor of strike authorization. But by itself this will resolve nothing.

The critical question is the independent initiative taken by rank-and-file workers. As O'Brien's comments at this week's meeting show once again, the Teamster leadership will do nothing to wage a serious struggle. The WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party urge UPS workers to build rank-and-file committees in each workplace to pierce the information blackout being imposed by the Teamsters, provide a forum for democratic discussion of their demands and plan for the widest and most effective strike action possible. Contact the WSWS today if you are interested in joining this fight!



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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