

Build the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee!

The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee
11 July 2023

In this the founding statement of the Committee, which was founded in a meeting held Sunday afternoon, rank-and-file UPS workers call for workers “to organize ourselves—not to ‘support’ the bargaining committee and to cheerlead for them, but to enforce our democratic will, and position ourselves to countermand the inevitable sellout.”

To join the committee, or for more information, email upsrnkandfilecommittee@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form at this bottom of this article.

Fellow UPS workers,

In a little more than two weeks, our contract with UPS expires. We voted by 97 percent to strike, a powerful signal that we are all prepared to fight against a logistics giant which has made record profits off our backs during the pandemic. We all know the issues we face: Wages that have not kept pace with inflation, part-timers unable to make ends meet with poverty pay and too few hours, delivery drivers working without air conditioning in sweltering conditions, 22.4 hybrid drivers and any other tier that the company might cook up, including personal vehicle drivers (PVDs), and management harassment, among other issues.

We can, and must, win major gains which embolden workers everywhere to push for their own demands. But we must first know who our friends and enemies are. We are not just facing UPS. We are also confronting the bureaucracy of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. In 2018, Teamsters officials rammed through our current contract against our will, even though a majority voted against it. Today, new General President Sean O’Brien is talking a big game, pledging to strike if a deal is not in place by August 1. But just as before, we have no real control over the situation. We are being asked to take their word for everything, without the ability to verify a single thing that comes out of the bureaucracy’s mouths.

Everything indicates that despite the public rhetoric, we are dealing with the same old Teamsters bureaucracy which violates our rights and enforces sellouts. **The only response must be to organize ourselves—not to “support” the bargaining committee and to cheerlead for them, but to enforce our democratic will, and position ourselves to countermand the inevitable sellout.** We must prepare action from below to impose the principle that the will of 340,000

UPS workers takes absolute priority over everything else.

In founding the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, we are taking the first step in that organizing. We call upon our coworkers to join us and build up a powerful network linking rank-and-file workers at every hub and location across the United States. This broadly democratic structure, controlled by workers ourselves and not the union apparatus, will provide us with means to share information which is being withheld from us, to freely discuss strategy and to coordinate joint actions across the country.

The most important part of any real “strike preparation” is information. Instead, the Teamsters bureaucracy is sowing constant confusion. We don’t know what is really happening in the contract talks. While the company’s initial economics proposal, which has been leaked, would create a new tier of lower-paid drivers, keep part-timers in poverty, pave the way for seven-day operations and even include “reverse” cost-of-living adjustments, we have no idea what the Teamsters’ proposals are. The bureaucracy’s story changes from one day to the next. One day they claim they have gotten nothing but victories for workers, with no concessions to the company. The next day they claim that UPS has dug in their heels, demanding massive cuts. One day they walk out of talks and claim they will not return until management sends a “serious” offer. The next day they are back at the table without anything resolved.

This shows that all the strike threats are theater. Whatever they may say in public, the truth is the Teamsters apparatus doesn’t want a strike. This is why their “strike preparation” has been limited to sporadic and pointless “practice pickets,” sometimes even held when nobody is working. They have said nothing about strike pay, which is critical, because two-thirds of our coworkers are part-timers who would struggle to pay their bills during a strike. Even the strike authorization vote was slapped together at the last minute, with voting mostly limited to local halls, effectively preventing high participation.

We must be on guard against another sellout. There is every possibility that they will suddenly announce a deal at any point between now and 11:59 PM on July 31 to prevent a strike, which meets none of our demands. They may also simply let the August 1 deadline roll by without doing anything. We can’t take anything they say at face value.

The recent contract at ABF is a warning to us. That deal was a sellout, with economics similar to UPS' initial proposal, and which will continue to underfund truckers' pension obligations. It was passed under suspicious circumstances. One local after another reportedly rejected the deal, only for the Teamsters to declare in the end that it had been ratified "overwhelmingly." We must also draw the lessons from the railroads, where maintenance of way workers and locomotive engineers are Teamster members. The bureaucracy claims they are preparing for a strike at UPS, but last year, even though our brothers and sisters on the railroads voted by over 99 percent to strike, they delayed for months with "status quo" extensions until Congress finally stepped in with a pre-emptive ban on their strike and the imposition of the contract workers rejected. Behind the scenes, there can't be any doubt the Biden administration, in close coordination with top Teamsters officials, is preparing to do the same at UPS.

We urge that UPS workers take up the following four-pronged strategy:

First, demand full transparency in the contract talks. We pay these people's salaries with our dues money and have every right to know everything that there is to know about what is being talked about behind our backs. We demand the following:

- The immediate release of the full text of all tentative agreements for all supplemental contracts, as well as all separate local deals;
- The publication of the Teamsters' initial economic proposal. There is no legitimate reason to conceal it from the rank-and-file;
- The live-streaming of all future bargaining sessions;
- The presence of real rank-and-file representatives, not appointed by the bureaucracy but elected by workers and accountable solely to them, with the authority to control the talks.

Second, establish what your "red line" demands are, without which you will not ratify any contract. Regardless of what the Teamsters bureaucracy is or is not demanding, we must make clear what it is *we* are demanding. Workers should organize meetings among themselves at their hubs, and draft and pass resolutions with clear contract demands, and declaring that you will not accept any contract which does not include them. We propose the following demands:

- Wage increases to compensate for inflation since the last contract, and cost-of-living adjustments fully indexed to inflation;
- \$25 per hour starting pay for part-timers, with enough minimum guaranteed hours to live off of, with the option to roll over to full time for all who want it without delay;
- The immediate inclusion of air conditioning in all existing vehicles, not just the ones which UPS promises to buy in the future;
- Fully guaranteed pensions;

- The elimination of all tiers, with the same wage scale for all current and future employees;

- Workers' control over safety, including the right to stop work in unsafe conditions such as wildfire smoke or an outbreak of COVID.

Third, make genuine, rank-and-file preparations for a strike. Instead of "practice picketing" controlled by the bureaucrats—which in reality means practicing getting strung out on the picket line until they sell us out—we must prepare for a strike by organizing rank-and-file strike committees at every workplace. This will give us the means to enforce the August 1 deadline. Until *all* our demands have been met, any deal must not be considered binding on the membership, and any attempt to prevent or delay a strike illegitimate. We must assert the right to take any collective actions which we deem necessary.

We must also demand *full strike pay equal to 100 percent of our wages*, especially for part-timers, from day one of any stoppage. According to government figures, the IBT is sitting on over \$460 million in net assets. That is our money! To free up additional resources to pay for a strike, all non-essential union personnel must be furloughed for the duration of the strike, with all remaining staff paid at the level of an average UPS part-timer.

Fourth, appeal for the broadest possible support among workers everywhere. Our real allies are workers around the world who are fighting the same attacks by the same giant corporations and the same treachery by union bureaucrats. They are not the strike-breaking Democrats and Republicans whom the Teamsters bureaucrats cavort with.

Delegations of rank-and-file workers should fan out to speak to dockworkers, auto workers—where a contract for 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers expires in September—Fedex workers, Amazon, US Postal Service workers—which is cutting tens of thousands of jobs and slashing annual wages by \$20,000 a year—and others. Strikes and workers' protests are on the rise all over the world. We must also unite with our brothers and sisters in countries all over the world, who have the same interests as us. A particular appeal should be made to Royal Mail workers in Britain, who have formed the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee to fight a sellout contract there.

If you agree with this, join us! Contact the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing upsrnkandfilecommittee@gmail.com today.



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