

Teamsters hold rally in Los Angeles as negotiations re-start at UPS

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Despite scorching temperatures, hundreds of striking film and television workers, along with teachers, longshore and hotel workers, joined UPS workers for a downtown rally held in Los Angeles on Wednesday. The event was held 12 days before the August 1 strike deadline for 340,000 UPS workers.

The rally, which was sponsored and promoted by the Democratic Socialists of America, was called by the Teamsters and joined by several other unions, including the Writers Guild of America (WGA), Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), UNITE HERE Local 11 and Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA).

This was the latest in a series of rallies held by the Teamsters over the past several days. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien appeared this week at a rally in Ontario, California, and on Saturday in New York City, while General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman traveled to the Worldport air freight hub in Louisville, Kentucky.

While not as large as the march held last month in Los Angeles by the entertainment unions, which drew thousands of striking writers and their supporters, Wednesday's rally still attracted hundreds of Los Angeles-area workers from many different industries.

Sean, a UPS driver, told WSWs reporters, "I wasn't expecting so many people. I didn't know we were being supported by all these people."

A driver for over 20 years, he explained that the job was "hard, it's tough. The heat, it's hard on your body, on your mental health sometimes, you know, just getting the job done every single day.

"It's hard on your family. I've got a seven-month-old son right now. You've got to keep on top of the cost of living. You know, especially in Los Angeles, it's hard."

The presence of workers from different companies and unions expressed a real desire for unity and a recognition that the various strikes and contract struggles taking place are part of a single and growing movement of the working class.

But the various union officials who spoke at the event offered a different kind of "unity." The trade union bureaucrats are locking arms to build up their credibility and prevent the emergence of an independent movement of the rank and file, even as they work behind the scenes with the corporations and the White House to betray workers' struggles.

The same day as the rally was held, the Teamsters announced that negotiations would restart next week with UPS, after talks collapsed

on July 5. While the union claims this was the result of the company "bowing to pressure," in reality it is a clear sign that the union is desperate to work with UPS to head off a strike with a last-minute deal. In a Sunday webinar, O'Brien admitted that the union would not call a strike on August 1 as it has continuously pledged to do in the event that a last-minute tentative agreement is reached. Instead, it would delay it by as much as three and a half weeks to try and ratify it.

Two weeks ago, delegates from around the country formed the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which declared in its founding statement that the task workers faced is "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." That perspective is precisely what the bureaucracy is trying to cut off.

In the event, which lasted little more than a half hour, several officials from the various unions gave short speeches aimed at projecting a veneer of militancy. Lindsay Dougherty, secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Hollywood Local 399 and director of the Teamsters' Motion Picture and Theatrical Trade Division, yelled her usual vulgar rhetoric, which several other bureaucrats, such as Yvonne Wheeler, president of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor AFL-CIO, also mimicked.

Other speakers included Susan Minato, co-president of UNITE HERE Local 11, Chris Keyser, co-chair of the WGA, and Ben Whitehair, executive vice president of SAG-AFTRA.

As he has done at most of his recent appearances, Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien felt compelled to claim that he was demanding the White House not interfere in the current negotiations between the union and company.

"We have been very clear," O'Brien said. "We have stated our intention with the White House, that the neighborhood I grew up in, when you got two people fighting in the street, you got nothing to do with it, you keep on walking."

This is nonsense, given the fact that O'Brien is a regular visitor at the White House and played key role in delaying and ultimately preventing a strike on the railroads last year. But the fact that O'Brien feels compelled to continuously make such statements is a sign that the danger of state intervention is being widely discussed among workers.

At the White House press briefing this past Monday, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre confirmed that acting Labor

Secretary Julie Su was playing a “constructive and productive role” in the ongoing negotiations at UPS.

“Anytime there are these discussions, we want to make sure we are playing a constructive and productive role,” Jean-Pierre said, adding, “We continue to be in touch with both parties, constructively; support any efforts to reach a solution. But again, we are confident that both sides are going to come to an agreement and continue to have a constructive presence as we continue to stay in touch.”

This is at least the third major workers struggle in the last year where the White House has directly intervened in order to force through an agreement.

Last month, the Biden White House dispatched Su to spring a tentative agreement on West Coast dockers. This was in response to wildcat actions at American ports in defiance of a “no strike pledge” by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). The purpose of the tentative agreement was to drive a wedge between American ILWU members and ILWU members in Canada, who have launched a strike at ports across British Columbia.

The division of dockworkers across national lines has strengthened the hands of governments on both sides of the border. The Canadian government yesterday declared the dockworkers’ strike illegal and ordered them back to work. Similar actions are being prepared by the Biden administration as a second line of defense if the union bureaucracy proves unable to hold the growing strike wave in check.

Last year, Su served as deputy to then Labor Secretary Marty Walsh during the rail struggle that ended with the banning of the strike by Congress. The vote to ban the strike, which was signed into law by self-declared “pro-labor” President Biden, was supported by an overwhelming majority of Democrats and Republicans, including New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other fake “socialists” in the Democratic Socialists of America.

Ocasio-Cortez joined O’Brien on the podium in a rally last weekend in New York City, and the Teamsters’ Twitter account has been re-tweeting “support” from dozens of congresspeople, who voted to ban the rail strike.

Also on Wednesday, Senator Bernie Sanders sent an open letter, co-signed by 200 members of both houses of Congress, to UPS and the Teamsters “affirming” their “support of our constituents’ rights to collectively bargain with their employer.” It further declared: “We are hopeful that both sides can negotiate in good faith” to prevent a strike; “we commit to respect our constituents’ statutory and constitutional rights to ... participate in a strike.”

The letter was aimed at whitewashing their role in banning the rail strike last year. It ended by declaring that “Congress has not previously intervened in recent history to [enforce a contract] *under the National Labor Relations Act* [emphasis added], and we commit to not intervening in the process between Teamsters and UPS.” This is a dishonest sleight of hand meant to cover up the fact that they enforced a contract under the Railway Labor Act last year, not the NLRA. At any rate, they said nothing about the very real possibility of an injunction by President Biden under the Taft-Hartley Act, which would not require Congressional authorization.

Workers spoke with WSWs reporters after the event.

Jacqueline, a UPS driver for three years, explained the sweltering conditions workers have to endure inside and outside the warehouse. “The trucks have no AC, and they get to about 120 degrees in the back. So when you’re searching for a package, it’s just horrible. You could be back there for five minutes.

“We’re provided water, but we’re not provided anything that keeps us cool long enough for our 12-hour shifts, sometimes even longer. We don’t have family time. You get up, you come to work early in the morning, and you get home late at night. I know, I’m a mother of two, and it’s a struggle for me. And I work all these hours because, number one, the company forces us; and number two, my pay is still really low. It’s not even a livable wage.”

As far as working conditions inside the warehouse, Jacqueline said, “It’s very hot in there. And as a driver, I feel like it didn’t get any better. It just got worse. It got harder, physically and mentally. We’re just trying to get what we deserve.

“The corporations, the heads of our corporations are getting, you know, they have mansions. And what do we have? A simple home, and they think that that’s okay, but we are the ones doing all the work.”

Asked by WSWs reporters if she thought the struggle of UPS workers was part of a growing international strike movement, Jacqueline responded, “I would think so. We would have to, as a whole, just to have better conditions for everyone across the world.”

Like many workers, Jacqueline did not support the unending war in Ukraine. “A lot of our money is being sent there [by the US government], but you are not taking care of your own people first.”

Referring to Russian and Ukrainian workers, Jacqueline said, “The enemy is not ‘their’ working class. The enemy is the upper class.”



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