

UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee holds public meeting on sellout contract

Our reporter
30 July 2023

To join the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, or for more information, email upsrankandfilecommittee@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form at this bottom of this article.

The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee held a successful online meeting Saturday evening, when more than 300 UPS workers and their supporters registered to discuss organizing against the sellout tentative agreement proposed by the Teamsters union.

The wide turnout is a sign of growing opposition to the contract, which contains substandard wage increases and freezes to pension contributions for workers throughout much of the US. Many workers spoke about different aspects of the deal, as well as how a fight could be organized against the bureaucracy. Workers also heard reports from rank-and-file representatives from other industries, as well as from a delegate from the rank-and-file committee at Royal Mail in the United Kingdom.

The opening report was delivered by WSWs writer Tom Hall, who began by placing the fight at UPS in its broader context. The biggest upsurge in working class struggle in decades is underway, he said. A key feature of this movement, however, is the collision between rank-and-file workers and the pro-corporate bureaucracy.

Hall continued: “There is a lot of justified anger about this tentative agreement at UPS, and momentum is building quickly for a ‘no’ vote. The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee welcomes and encourages that. But everyone on this call is going to have to make a choice about what you are going to do. Everything depends on the self-activity of the rank and file.

“The worst mistake you can make is to assume that a no vote will convince or pressure the Teamsters bureaucracy into coming back with a better deal—to vote no and then sit back and wait for what will happen next,” he warned.

The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, he said, “in developing a network of committees linking up workers at different hubs, represents a new organizing structure which workers actually control. It will give you the means to

countermand the decisions of the apparatus and to share information and break the propaganda blitz to bring the truth to your coworkers.

“Most importantly, it gives you the means to appeal for support and unity from workers all over the world. The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which is composed of similar bodies all over the world. By uniting with workers in other companies and industries, where they are facing the same betrayals, UPS workers will find the strength they need to defeat this tentative agreement.”

Hall reviewed certain features of the contract in more detail, including the de facto freeze on pension contributions for much of the country. He pointed to a new clause on page 24 of the contract, which cut increases to health and welfare and pension contributions in half for all of those in pension funds which are not “distressed.” This effectively would leave money only for healthcare increases, with nothing left over for pensions.

Those pensions which will continue to receive small increases include the IBT-UPS fund, which covers what used to be the Central States until UPS pulled out of the union-operated fund in 2007. It also includes the New England fund, which, incidentally, is controlled by General President Sean O’Brien.

Hall also reviewed the so-called “historic” pay increase to \$21 for new part-timers. This was so low, he explained, that many part-timers already make more than this in many parts of the country due to Market Rate Adjustments.

However, he then put the wage in its historic context. In 1978, the starting pay for part-timers was \$7.75, or more than \$37 today adjusted for inflation. Over the next 35 years, this rate increased by only 75 cents, and real pay for part-timers declined by around 70 percent by 2013. In other words, a \$21 per hour wage would not even come close to recovering decades of lost wages “bargained” away by the Teamsters bureaucracy.

Following Hall, a member of the UPS Workers Rank-and-

File Committee from the Worldport air hub in Louisville, Kentucky, spoke. “What we are dealing with is a 115-year-old company, which controls the flow of 7 percent of Gross National Product, 2 percent of global Gross National Product and distributes 25 percent of domestic parcels in the United States,” he said.

“This contract is not just about the last five years but the last 20 years of sellouts forced down UPS laborers’ throats. The current IBT came up through the ranks of the previous James P. Hoffa administration. These are no more change agents than Hoffa was himself.”

He continued, “We’ve gone through a pandemic where small businesses were shattered, and large corporations were able to get the lions’ share. The last years, UPS has doubled its profits, and took in \$100 billion in revenue. Those record profits continue to grow. ... This is a trend that is not going away with the supply chain nation we currently live in.”

He continued, “Many of us are subjected to career part-time jobs” before we are able to get to full-time status. “The future language does nothing but create more tiered wage structures for workers.”

He concluded, “What we need now is a call to action—continued membership in the rank-and-file committees across the United States, not only at UPS but in the logistics industry as a whole. Not only on a domestic basis but on an international basis. This is a war that is going against working class people all over the globe, and it’s our time to stand and fight.”

A vigorous discussion with workers followed.

“[Sean O’Brien] lied about the contract,” one worker said. “He said we would be on strike by August 1 if we didn’t have a contract. Then he ‘baited and switched’ it to if we didn’t have a tentative agreement instead. I was on the other webinars [hosted by the Teamsters], and he let it slip that he had no intention of implementing a strike. The way I look at it is we need to organize to vote no to start out with ... but what you said is correct, it’s the workers that need to take control of this.

“Otherwise, they’ll try ways to force the contract on us. We got rid of the two-thirds rule [a loophole which allowed the bureaucracy to override ‘no’ votes], but they forced the contract on the railroad workers using the Railway Labor Act. They try to say that won’t happen [here], but that’s a lie, because they can use the Taft-Hartley Act. ... We have got to be prepared to strike regardless of what the government does. That’s why we need to organize.”

Several other workers made comments about the inadequate wage progression for drivers. Another worker asked what transferring power from the rank and file to the bureaucracy would look like in practice.

That question was answered by Will Lehman, a worker at

Mack Trucks who ran for president of the United Auto Workers last year on a platform of abolishing not reforming, the apparatus. The bureaucrats should be thrown out and replaced with rank-and-file committees, he said. Lehman also explained that the UAW bureaucracy is following the Teamsters’ script in next month’s auto contract. Like O’Brien, the union has elevated career official Shawn Fain as a bogus “reform” president.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of UAW members never received ballots in the first-ever direct election of top union officers, as the bureaucracy suppressed turnout to only 9 percent, the lowest level in the history of union elections. Lehman has filed a lawsuit against the Department of Labor over voter suppression in the election.

The meeting was also addressed by Tony Robson, a representative of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee in Britain, which has been battling a sellout contract by the Communications Workers Union at Royal Mail. Robson laid out how the union bureaucracy used every trick in the book to overcome workers’ opposition, including by delaying the vote multiple times and by starting enforcement of the contract terms before it had even been voted on.

Finally, Alex Findijs, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, gave a report on the bankruptcy of Yellow freight, where the Teamsters canceled a strike the previous week over nonpayment of pensions. This was done in order to clear the deck for the tentative agreement at UPS.

Two Teamster bureaucrats attempted unsuccessfully to disrupt the meeting. Their attempts fell completely flat. One, describing himself as a “rank-and-file” representative on the national bargaining committee, was exposed when a worker said that he was really the vice president of his local. “I hope the continental breakfast at the hotel during negotiations was worth it,” he said, “because you sold us out.” The response indicated a determined atmosphere among the rank and file, who are in no mood to be intimidated by the union apparatus.

At the end of the meeting, many workers sent in their contact information to join the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact