

Socialist Alternative, Left Voice promote loyal “vote no” campaign to head off rank-and-file rebellion at UPS

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Since the announcement of the tentative agreement at UPS, the pseudo-left has sprung into action to shield the Teamsters bureaucracy from growing rank-and-file anger. Workers are furious not only that the so-called “historic” contract falls far below their demands, but at the way in which it was prepared by a deceitful “strike ready” campaign by the union. The pretensions of the new union administration of President Sean O’Brien to represent a break with the union’s corrupt “old guard,” of which O’Brien was and is part, is collapsing under the weight of its own actions.

The tentative agreement poses the need for a rank-and-file rebellion by workers against the union apparatus, not the reform of the bureaucracy from within by a non-existent “progressive” faction. Workers must fight to abolish the bureaucracy, which is joined at the hip with management and the corporate-controlled political establishment, and replace it with rank-and-file committees, organs of power which they genuinely control.

Organizations that represent sections of the apparatus and the upper middle class are determined to prevent this. To use a military analogy, it has deployed into two groups manning two lines of defense against the counter-offensive by workers.

The first line, and by far the largest, includes the Democratic Socialists of America, *Labor Notes*, the so-called “reform” caucus Teamsters for a Democratic Union and others. They are repeating the false claims that the contract is an “historic” win and presenting it as the product of “rank-and-file” pressure. These organizations have functioned openly for years as the public relations teams for the new Teamsters administration and were instrumental in organizing and promoting the fake “strike ready” campaign this year. They are nervously attacking rank-and-file opposition from below as the product of “bad actors” and outside agitators.

However, the open support for the sellout contract is only discrediting these organizations and making them the target of rank-and-file anger as well. In and of itself, they are not sufficient to rein in the workers and keep them under the control of the bureaucracy.

Therefore, a second line of defense is promoting a loyal opposition, calling for the development of a “rank-and-file” campaign to reject the contract and nothing more. While they make certain modest criticisms that the deal does not “go far enough,” their “rank-and-fileism” ignores and rejects the need for a rebellion against the apparatus. They promote the same program of mass “pressure” and bureaucratic self-reform which they, together with the DSA, TDU and other groups on the first line of defense, have promoted for decades.

The most significant groups in this reserve line include Socialist

Alternative and Left Voice. Socialist Alternative is the organization of Kshama Sawant, who has spent nearly a decade as a member of the Seattle City Council. She announced earlier this year that she would not seek re-election, instead focusing her attention on a Socialist Alternative-backed initiative called “Workers Strike Back,” which was formed largely in response to popular outrage over the DSA’s open support for banning a rail strike last year. In a statement, she criticized the DSA, of which she is also a member, for the “misleadership” of its members in Congress and declared: “The task of rebuilding the class struggle in America will go nowhere if young people and the rank-and-file of the labor movement are not clear about the role of the Democratic Party.”

In reality, Sawant herself has functioned as a Democrat her entire political career and was even endorsed by the Seattle Democratic Party for re-election. In 2015, she attended a fundraiser celebrating a local Democratic Party leader who had just voted in favor of a new juvenile prison, whom she declared “the ally of working people for a long time.”

Left Voice is a Morenoite publication, a tendency which broke from Trotskyism in the 1960s and adapted to Castroism and other nationalist movements in Latin America. A comment on August 1 appearing in *Left Voice*, “UPS Teamsters, We Can Fight for More: Vote No on the Tentative Agreement,” declared: “... it’s clear that despite some important advances, this contract is far from ‘historic’ and falls short on many counts, especially for part-timers.”

Left Voice tries to frame workers’ opposition to the deal as the continuation of the bureaucratically-controlled “strike-ready” campaign. “Throughout the contract and strike campaign, our union has emphasized the need for us UPS workers to push back against the divisions of our classifications and fight with one fist. ... In that spirit, we urge our Teamsters siblings to vote no on this tentative agreement and use this unprecedented momentum to fight for a contract that leaves no one behind.”

They conclude: “We need to take the struggle into our own hands, organizing our ranks on the shop floor to fight for the contract that we rightfully deserve. This contract is for workers, so workers should be the ones to decide on its outcome.”

Their reference to “taking the struggle into our own hands” leaves out completely any criticism of the maneuvers of the bureaucracy and the development of a struggle against it—indeed, the name “O’Brien” does not even appear once in the article. It is not only hollow, it demobilizes and politically disarms workers in the face of relentless attacks against them by the bureaucracy.

Workers must reject the contract, but this must be combined with a strategy to mobilize workers against the entire apparatus. The Teamsters bureaucracy will not respond by going back and getting a better contract. It is determined to get this contract passed because behind it stands Wall Street and the Biden administration, which cannot tolerate a show of opposition from UPS workers that would embolden workers across the US and the world. Indeed, a rebellion against the bureaucracy is necessary even to ensure the integrity of the vote itself, given that the apparatus will pull out all the stops to manipulate the vote.

The experience on the railroads last year, where the Teamsters and other unions used ballot fraud and endless delays to pave the way for Congress to ban a strike shows the type of conscious sabotage which UPS workers confront. Indeed, only last month, with a week to go before the deadline at UPS, the Teamsters called off a strike at freight carrier Yellow at the last minute in order to buy the company time to empty out its warehouses and prepare for bankruptcy.

Socialist Alternative's Workers Strike Back (WSB) group spells out this pro-bureaucracy "opposition" even more openly. In a statement calling for a "no" vote, the group calls for the continuation of the Teamsters' theatrical "strike ready" campaign: "In the meantime there's no reason why the union should not continue with practice pickets, strike plans, and community mobilization." But these were designed from the start to get out in front of workers before they got out of the control of the Teamsters. By calling for these to be continued, they are "demanding" that the bureaucracy resume lying to workers.

It then adds, "Organizations like Teamsters for a Democratic Union, which has had thousands of UPS workers attending meetings, should provide a structure for discussions on the TA, and more importantly, how to increase the pressure on UPS if workers want to vote 'NO' and fight for more."

In other words, WSB is "demanding" that a bureaucratic faction that bears central responsibility for the contract, and that has spent years pulling the wool over workers' eyes, take the leading role in building rank-and-file opposition! The statement does not even acknowledge, or attempt to explain, why TDU is now furiously *promoting* the contract. On Twitter, TDU co-chair Sean Orr even attacked WSB's lukewarm opposition to the contract as the product of outside agitators.

These points were also stressed in an online meeting held by the group on July 30. Lead speaker Steve Capri, a WSB activist out of Pittsburgh, called on workers to vote no in order to "continue this monumental 340,000 person organizing drive." The broader question workers faced, he claimed, was to "break through this defeatism, this fear of a militant strategy against the bosses." But the bureaucracy is not gripped by a conservative "defeatist" attitude from which they can be shaken loose by rank-and-file pressure. They are consciously betraying workers, in close collaboration with both management and the government.

"Historically, Teamsters for a Democratic Union has played a really important role in leading the way on rank-and-file involvement, in real democracy in the union and standing up to the union leaders when it was necessary. Unfortunately," he added without further explanation, "TDU has not filled that role in putting forward alternatives to the contract or providing a space for the widest discussion and debate on this TA so far."

In fact, TDU never "led the way in rank-and-file involvement," but, based on a perspective of reforming the bureaucracy by replacing

"bad" leaders with "good" ones, has spent decades casting about for alliances with sections of the apparatus and the government. Those workers who had believed TDU was in some way opposed to the bureaucracy have left the organization long ago, especially after it moved to endorse O'Brien in 2018, a notorious thug who was once even suspended for threatening TDU candidates.

The panel also included Joe Allen, a former leading member of TDU and author of *The Package King: A Rank-and-File History of UPS* who spent much of his time hailing the Teamsters administration of Ron Carey in the 1990s, the last president who was backed by TDU—until O'Brien. Allen went so far as to call the 1997 UPS strike called by Carey as "PATCO in reverse," referencing the Reagan administration's smashing of the air traffic controllers strike in 1981.

In reality, Carey sold out the 1997 UPS strike, which resulted in a pathetic 50 cent increase in pay for part-timers. His re-election campaign was later caught embezzling money from the union, laundered through the Democratic Party. While this was used for factional purposes by his opponents in the apparatus to expel him, there is no doubt that this embezzlement took place. Allen, as well as TDU, continue to claim Carey as a martyr to this day.

The real target of this loyal "vote no" campaign is not the contract. It is the growing support for rank-and-file committees. In its statement calling for a "no" vote, the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee clearly connected the fight against the contract with the fight against the entire bureaucratic apparatus:

... the bureaucrats will not see the light and come up with something better if we vote down the contract. They'll try to make us vote again, or worse, go to Biden to get an injunction. Therefore, the 'no' vote must be the starting point for the rank and file to build alternative structures outside the control of the bureaucracy, to transfer power to the rank and file where it belongs.

The negotiating committee which bargained this deal must be thrown out and replaced with one composed of representatives chosen from, and accountable to, the rank and file only. The information blackout must end, with all future bargaining sessions being livestreamed and no more Non-Disclosure Agreements.

Such a class-conscious rebellion is what the pseudo-left "vote no" campaign is trying to prevent.



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