

All-out propaganda blitz by Teamsters bureaucrats in final days of UPS vote

Tom Hall
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Attend the online public meeting, “The ‘No’ vote at UPS and the next stage of the battle against the Teamsters bureaucracy,” hosted by the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, this Sunday at 7 p.m. Eastern. Register for the event here.

With the end of voting next Tuesday, the Teamsters bureaucracy is engaged in a desperate, last-ditch effort to ensure the passage of the sellout contract for 340,000 workers at UPS, combining a public relations blitz on social media with intimidation tactics against rank-and-file opponents.

These measures are in response to signs of significant opposition from rank-and-file members. A knowledgeable source told the WSWS that “no” votes are likely for the Southwest rider, the Northern California supplement and the Western supplement, and a rejection of the national master agreement is a serious possibility.

One worker, summing up the attitude of the rank and file, said: “In this day and age, where many members have access to other resources outside the union local, such as social media and message boards, it’s harder to keep things secret. People are taking their [regional contract] supplements and comparing apples to apples, because we all do the same job at the end of the day. ... Members are realizing that some in different parts of the country are getting left behind and this upsets and angers them. As for the [national agreement], a lot of members disagree with the weak language on protections against forced overtime, guaranteed shifts lengths and harassment, which are the main topics for every employee, part-time and full-time.”

This underscores the urgency that UPS workers organize themselves to not only continue to push for a contract rejection, but also, in the words of a recent statement by the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, to “finally settle our score with the bureaucracy, which has sold us out for decades, to throw it out and return power to the Teamsters membership where it belongs.”

Turnout so far is very low, at below 35 percent, and has barely increased in recent days. This is more than 10 percentage points lower than the turnout in the last contract vote in 2018. At the time, the Teamsters bureaucracy overrode a majority “no” vote by citing an anti-democratic clause in the union constitution, which required a contract to be rejected by a two-thirds supermajority if turnout was under 50 percent. However,

faced with massive rank-and-file anger, the bureaucracy later repealed that clause, meaning the tentative agreement can now be defeated by a simple majority.

The low turnout, in part, is likely due to the method of balloting. While voting is online, the union is sending mailers to workers with a QR code and registration information required for workers to cast their ballot. In addition to the likelihood that many workers’ addresses have not been kept up to date, it is also likely that many workers threw out their mailers, mistaking it for junk mail.

“What does the bureaucracy expect?” one member of the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee said. “They were given a mandate. It seems that they didn’t quite understand that directive ... if you wanted an engaged membership, then represent the membership.” He concluded: “It’s a ‘no.’ A ‘Hell no!’”

However, the turnout is also a sign of deep alienation among UPS workers, and that the endlessly repeated claims that the TA is an “historic” agreement have failed to generate much enthusiasm.

The Teamsters’ Twitter page has been dominated by video statements, presented as the voice of rank-and-file workers, urging people to vote yes. However, they have provoked hostile responses. “If a ‘no’ vote comes to pass will you continue with these lies or will you listen to us finally?” one worker replied. “Yeah those NDAs [non-disclosure agreement, under which the contract talks were conducted behind closed doors] were a huge benefit to members,” another said sarcastically.

The union is also resorting to outright falsehoods. For example, they claim in one tweet that that second tier 22.4, or “hybrid” drivers, who are being reclassified as regular drivers under the new deal, will see their wages double under the new contract. In fact, their top rate is currently around \$35, with minor variations depending on region. As regular drivers this would increase to around \$42 in the first year of the proposed deal, gradually increasing to around \$49 by 2027—increases of 20 to 40 percent, respectively.

Their claim that wages would “double” appears to be based on the miserable, four-year wage progression. Under the new deal, progression for regular drivers would start out at only \$23, only slightly more than the new starting rate for part-time

workers (See section 41.2 in the tentative agreement). Given the fact that the 22.4 driver position was only created in 2018, the vast majority of these workers are likely still in progression.

In the same tweet thread, the bureaucracy pats itself on the back, declaring, “It is rare in the labor movement to force a company to eliminate a two-tiered wage system. But thanks to historic rank-and-file mobilizing, UPS #Teamsters did it.” In reality, the TA creates another tier out of all new part-timers, who will not be eligible for general wage increases, and maintains the most fundamental division between full and part-timers.

In mailers being sent out, the bureaucracy is also re-writing history, claiming: “On July 31 ... all UPS Teamsters local unions across the United States and Puerto Rico unanimously endorsed” the national agreement.

In fact, Local 89 in Louisville, Kentucky, which covers the massive Worldport freight hub, originally voted against recommending the deal, before reversing itself only a few days later (they had claimed this had been due to concerns that UPS could possibly implement wage cuts in some regions to offset contractual pay increases, an issue which workers are still concerned about). At any rate, the fact that rank-and-file opposition finds no reflection whatsoever within the apparatus is an expression of the deep isolation from and hostility to the rank and file.

Meanwhile, top Teamsters officials are keeping a very low profile. General President Sean O’Brien, who prior to the agreement had been criss-crossing the country attending rallies as part of the union’s fake “strike ready” campaign, has hardly made any public appearances, except for an interview with Fox Business Channel on the bankruptcy of Yellow Freight. General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman, the number two man in the union hierarchy, has reportedly gone on vacation.

They are relying instead on local officials to push the contract. At some locations, such as the Swan Island hub in Portland, Oregon, workers have had to run a gauntlet of business agents, stewards and other local officers campaigning for a “yes” vote on their way to work. However, at other locals, little to nothing has apparently been done.

With its options limited to generate enthusiasm for the deal, the Teamsters bureaucracy is falling back on its tried-and-true method of intimidation and threats. Multiple workers have reported that local informational meetings have been stacked with supporters of the bureaucracy who shouted down any statements of opposition.

Workers are also allegedly being threatened for making critical posts on social media. UPS worker Carl Gregory has filed a National Labor Relations Board complaint against Vincent Perrone, Eastern Region Package Director and president of Local 804 in New York City, for what he described as a “direct personal attack” in response to a post challenging the union’s claimed \$30 billion price tag for the new contract.

Perrone has been cited extensively in coverage of UPS by

Jacobin magazine, the de-facto organ of the Democratic Socialists of America, which has been promoting the contract.

Western Package Director Mark Davison has also reacted furiously to a package driver who helped uncover discrepancies in pension contributions between the Pacific Northwest, where Davison is based, and the rest of the Western region. The supplemental agreements in Oregon and Washington include an increase of \$1.50 per hour in pension contributions over the life of the contract, while pensions in the rest of the Western US will receive little to nothing.

One worker demanded an explanation for this, which also appears to contradict language in the national contract which freezes pension contributions for all regional pension funds not in financial distress.

The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages a “no” vote by the widest possible margin. This would be a powerful blow against the attempted betrayal by the union apparatus. But having defeated the TA, workers must prepare themselves for stage two of the sellout. Workers cannot count on pressure to shift the bureaucracy into fighting for its interests. Instead, they must organize themselves independently to shift power from the apparatus to the shop floor and prepare themselves to countermand the second phase of the sellout.

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