

Teamsters declare ratification of sellout contract at Anheuser-Busch

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The Teamsters declared the ratification of its sellout contract at Anheuser-Busch Tuesday night. After three days of rushed voting in which workers were given little to no time to review the contract, the Teamsters claimed that the contract was ratified by 86 percent. As of this writing no vote totals have been released by the union.

While the Teamsters claim overwhelming enthusiasm for the deal, the voting process was not legitimate. Workers were given barely any time to review the contents of the contract, discuss it among themselves and ask questions of the union. One worker reported that they were not even given copies of the contract at a local meeting. A union business agent presented a slide show on the contract, fielded a few questions and then told workers to vote.

Workers were also threatened that if they failed to ratify the contract, the Teamsters union would rescind the doubling of strike pay which they announced to great fanfare last month. The bureaucracy spent weeks issuing blustering threats, declaring it was prepared to call a national strike, only to call it off at the last minute before the last contract expired.

This exposes the fact that the Teamsters never had any intention of calling a strike, and that its so-called “strike ready” campaign was really meant to sell a deal they had already worked out with management. If workers rejected the deal, the union bureaucracy would punish them by starving them out on the picket line.

Despite claims from the Teamsters bureaucracy that the deal was “historic,” the contract was in reality a sellout that failed to meet worker’s needs and will allow management to close breweries at will. The \$8 an hour raise over five years barely keeps up with inflation and workers will still make less than they did in the late 90s after decades of concessionary contracts. Pension

contributions will only increase by 20 cents an hour each year, and the seventh and eighth week of vacation, surrendered in a previous contract, will only be available after 25 and 30 years of service.

Whatever modest “gains” are in the contract will be offset by cuts elsewhere, as the company moves to implement automation and reduce its workforce in the coming years.

The bureaucracy hailed the contract for providing “job security” and preventing “permanent layoffs.” In reality it does the exact opposite, leaving the door open for brewery closures. Teamsters lawyer Gabe Dumont, who wrote the language on job security, openly admitted that brewery closures had been discussed with the company. He made these comments during a webinar on the contract that lasted just over 30 minutes and did not allow questions from the membership. This is an admission that the Teamsters are withholding information from the membership about which facilities will be closed along with when, and how many people would be affected.

The language to supposedly prevent “permanent layoffs” allows workers to transfer to a different facility if theirs closes. Not only does this accept the company’s authority to rip up families and force them to move across the country, it fails to actually protect the jobs that are lost in the closure.

The jobs that will be created will largely be based on “non traditional work” and the creation of a “maintenance workforce,” in the words of Dumont. Maintenance personnel in breweries are skilled workers who must pass a test in order to qualify for the position.

One worker who spoke with the WSWS said that while there is a shortage of maintenance workers at Anheuser-Busch, it was difficult to imagine displaced workers from operations filling maintenance roles.

“There is no strong language on ‘non-traditional’ jobs,” he said. “Does that mean non-traditional pay? There are a lot of unanswered questions. If the only transfers are to smaller microbreweries that make far less, you’re not gonna get paid the same as you make now.”

Workers who are displaced from their jobs will have to choose whether they will take a job somewhere across the country, uprooting their family, or losing their current job for just \$75,000 in severance. Many workers may not even be eligible for this. Dumont described the severance as for “longer term employees,” a phrase that could leave many workers with nothing.

In ramming through this contract, the Teamsters bureaucracy is following the script which it set at UPS nearly word-for-word. They declared the UPS contract last summer was an “historic contract” made possible by a supposed “credible strike threat.” In reality, the Teamsters had no intention of calling a strike. Only months later the company is now laying off over 12,000 people as it moves to eliminate whole sections of its workforce through automated facilities.

There is no doubt that the Teamsters bureaucracy already know which breweries are slated for potential closure, just as it must have been aware that UPS was planning massive cuts during contract talks. When Anheuser-Busch workers went on strike in 1976 there were 9,000 workers involved. Today there are only 5,000 workers under the Teamsters. More automation and job loss is coming and the Teamsters bureaucracy are more than willing to sacrifice those jobs in the name of “labor peace.”

Even without the hidden concessions, the fact that the contract was announced at the last minute to avert a strike is betrayal of the strike of Coors workers in Fort Worth, Texas. Hoping to be reinforced by 5,000 more striking workers, the 420 Teamsters at the Coors plant in Fort Worth are now facing the second largest brewer in the US and the fourth largest in the world on their own.

All of this poses the need for a fight, not only against Anheuser-Busch, but against the pro-corporate Teamsters bureaucracy. Strike pay comes from member dues, and so does the bloated salaries of the union functionaries who endorsed this contract. Sean O’Brien’s total declared compensation was \$350,000

last year. Jeffrey Padellaro, director of the Teamsters Brewery, Bakery and Soft Drink conference, made \$260,000. Yet the upper middle class bureaucrats who run the IBT treat worker’s dues money as their own. To them it is not money meant to support worker’s struggles, it is a slush fund meant to prop up their affluent lifestyles and support their friends in the anti-working class Democratic and Republican Parties.

The Teamsters bureaucracy cannot be reformed or pressured into doing right by workers. It must be abolished and replaced with rank-and-file control, returning power to the shop floor. This is the task of rank-and-file committees, new workers organizations independent of the bureaucratic apparatus that continues to sell out workers to the companies. Workers around the world have built rank-and-file committees from the auto industry to educators to build new leadership that will fight for the interests of the international working class, not collude with management behind worker’s backs.

In order to fight against the coming assault on jobs Anheuser-Busch workers must organize and build a movement, not just of brewery workers in the US but of all workers around the world, against the ceaseless attacks on jobs and living standards and to oppose the drive to war that is fueling the demands for austerity.



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