

Teamsters Local 952 keeps membership in the dark as Southern California bus drivers contract expires April 30

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Build a rank-and-file committee to organize against the new TA! Fill out the form at the bottom of this article for help getting started.

The Teamsters union has suddenly announced a new contract for approximately 600 Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) bus drivers in Southern California, only days before the current deal expires on April 30.

On April 19, Teamsters Local 952 issued a strike authorization vote to take place April 29 and 30. Five days later on April 24, the union instead announced that instead a contract ratification vote would take place on April 28 to 30.

As of this writing, no details about the contract have been given to the rank and file other than a brief note on the April 24 memo stating, “*YOUR BARGAINING TEAM WILL EXPLAIN OCTA’S OFFER/*A RATIFICATION VOTE WILL FOLLOW.”

This suggests that workers will be forced to vote immediately without having had the chance to review the contract themselves, based only on the say-so of the union bureaucracy.

Any contract which workers to vote on in such conditions can only be a sellout. If the contract contained significant gains, or even provisions which the Teamsters bureaucracy could dishonestly spin as huge gains, they would be shouting it from the rooftops. At any rate, workers should reject the contract on principle unless they have been given adequate time to study it.

The vote comes as the Teamsters bureaucracy nationwide keeps a guilty silence about a massive cost-cutting campaign at UPS, as the company moves to cut 200 facilities and automate the rest.

The measures were announced only months after the Teamsters rammed through a new contract through lies,

claiming it was one of the best in company history. In reality, UPS has cited “labor certainty” provided by the contract as key to their plans to cut tens of thousands of jobs.

In opposition, the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which warned in advance the Teamsters were preparing a sellout, is fighting to build a rebellion against the sellout. “We workers have every right to take all action deemed necessary to protect our jobs, regardless of whether you choose to sanction them or not,” a recent open letter by the committee to Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien said. “*If you will not fight the layoffs, then get out of the way so that UPS workers can do it ourselves.*”

At OCTA, employees covered under their current contract face a plethora of work-related issues stemming from low pay, inadequate lunch and restroom breaks and higher healthcare costs, which the last pro-corporate contract enforced by Teamsters Local 952 failed to address and will most likely continue under the new contract presented.

Many workers are paid so little that they cannot afford to live in Orange County where they work. Many have to travel from the Inland Empire, sometimes traveling 30 to 60 miles one way.

This will obviously make it harder for the lowest-paid workers to drive out to Orange County to take part in the hastily announced contract and authorization votes.

Local 952’s bureaucracy will follow the same rotten playbook used during their last contract vote in order to browbeat the membership into voting yes on a contract that they have yet to see.

One veteran OCTA bus driver commented: “Be careful, because a lot of things are changing very quickly. The union has been backtracking a little bit and trying to cover

themselves since a worker brought up the fact of the offer being the last and final offer. That is not what was posted at the base. Now all of a sudden the union is saying that it is the last and final offer. I'm calling it BS!"

Much like the previous contract ratification vote, in which membership worked for 10 months past the expiration of their contract, the bureaucracy has kept all details of the contract to themselves, effectively keeping the rank and file in the dark.

The rank and file drivers voted down the last concessionary contract twice. Like this time the union refused to inform them of the details and even attempted to intimidate the drivers by mandating that they could not return to vote later after they had a chance to consider the contract.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) call on all OCTA bus drivers to reject this offer until the full contract has been made available and all members have time to adequately review and discuss every detail of the contract.

Voting "No" is the first step. In order to win any major gains, the bus drivers must form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracy, in order to take control of all aspects of the negotiations between OCTA and the Teamsters.

Such committees have already been formed among UPS workers, railway workers, autoworkers, postal workers, educators that are united in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

A rank-and-file committee is needed to ensure that the membership is given accurate details of the contract, and that the Teamsters bureaucracy will not be able to leave workers on the job past April 30th, the date of the contract's expiration.

This struggle must also be expanded to other workers facing the same dismal working conditions such as public school teachers who have been betrayed by the United Teachers Los Angeles union, and UPS drivers who have also been betrayed by the Teamsters.



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