

Teamsters rush to force through contract for CVS warehouse workers in California

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Last Wednesday, workers at the CVS La Habra Distribution Center in California, represented by Teamsters Local 952, voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike (598 YES, 6 NO). The vote signaled the clear desire on the part of workers to conduct a serious fight against the multibillion-dollar pharmacy chain that has squeezed its workforce for years. Instead, in a blatant betrayal of the workers, the Teamsters bureaucracy immediately announced a contract, and then a snap ratification vote to be held just four days later, on Sunday, April 27.

This cynical maneuver was to sabotage the workers' momentum before it can translate into real action. It leaves workers almost no time to discuss, organize, or even review the terms of the rotten deal union officials are trying to ram through. This betrayal fits into the broader pattern of the Teamsters bureaucracy, now firmly aligned under Sean O'Brien's right-wing, pro-Trump leadership, selling out militant worker struggles to preserve its own privileges.

There is reportedly significant opposition to the deal, reflected indirectly even through divisions within the bargaining committee itself. According to one source, drivers, mechanics, maintenance and sanitation stewards in the negotiating committee did not endorse the tentative agreement. Drivers are outraged that they would get only \$7.10 in raises and \$1.50 in added pension contributions over four years.

One driver who attended a ratification meeting said: "The union is threatening us and saying that if the drivers vote the contract down they will allow the warehouse to work and we are on our own. You ever heard of that?"

Workers must organize to defeat this betrayal. Regardless of the outcome of the vote, the entire procedure has no legitimacy. It is the latest in a series of sellouts, including the national contract at UPS which was pushed through to avert a strike in 2023. Since then, tens

of thousands of warehouse workers have lost their jobs.

This requires the organization of a rank-and-file CVS workers' committee, a new structure controlled by the workers to transfer control out of the hands of the bureaucrats. Only through independent organization and action can workers enforce their democratic will.

The workers' anger against CVS is rooted in years of wage stagnation, grueling working conditions, and corporate contempt. The last contract, negotiated in 2020, delivered a meager 13 percent wage increase over five years—utterly wiped out by the surge in inflation?. Even compared to other unionized workers in the region, CVS warehouse workers have been left in the dust?.

These harsh conditions are borne most heavily by immigrant workers, who make up a significant portion of the La Habra workforce. They face not just exploitation but terror: under the Trump administration's intensifying deportation machine, immigrant workers live with the daily threat of being torn from their families. CVS profits off this fear, counting on it to keep the workforce compliant.

But workers are done, as many declared during the strike authorization drive. Their demands go beyond mere dollars and cents: they are fighting for safe conditions, a dignified pay and an end to discriminatory practices.

The workers' demands include wage increases to make up for years of stagnation and inflation, parity with other unionized warehouse and transportation workers in Southern California, improved working conditions and fair treatment, especially given the harsh conditions faced by many immigrant workers. Their demands reflect deep frustration not only over eroded wages but also over the broader atmosphere of exploitation they have endured under CVS management?.

CVS Health's financial reports for 2024 show total revenues reaching an astronomical \$372.8 billion, a 4.2 percent increase from 2023?. Despite a decline in net

income—falling to \$4.586 billion from \$8.368 billion the previous year—CVS remains massively profitable.

If Wall Street demands even more blood, management responds by slashing labor costs and squeezing workers harder. The stockholders' anger over a \$4.5 billion profit says everything about the capitalist profit system's priorities: endless enrichment for the few, suffering and insecurity for the many.

In this context, the demands of the CVS workers for a living wage and safe conditions are modest. Yet to the corporate executives and shareholders, any concession to labor is seen as an intolerable cut to their ever-expanding hoard.

Instead of preparing for a real fight, Teamsters Local 952 is conspiring with CVS to shut the struggle down. The sudden scheduling of the April 27 ratification vote is designed to prevent workers from having time to organize independently, to study the fine print of the deal, and to mobilize to reject it.

Lessons from UPS and beyond

CVS workers must learn from the above-referenced 2023 UPS betrayal, when more than 340,000 UPS workers mobilized and prepared to launch a national strike. But at the last minute, General President Sean O'Brien and the Teamsters bureaucracy pulled the plug, announcing a tentative agreement and declaring victory without a strike ever being called. The bureaucracy's actions prevented a struggle that could have electrified the entire American working class—because, in the end, the union bureaucracy feared the political and social power of workers more than they feared the companies?.

Now, under O'Brien's leadership, the Teamsters are even more nakedly hostile to the working class. His embrace of Trump's ultranationalism and "America First" tariffs shows exactly whose interests the union tops represent. They have abandoned even the pretense of international worker solidarity, throwing in their lot with the capitalist state and corporate America. They defend profits, not workers.

This makes the La Habra workers' fight not just an economic battle. It is a political struggle against a fascistic assault on democratic rights. Trump's administration has waged a relentless war against immigrants, against protesters, against the basic rights of the working class.

Deportations, surveillance and brutal repression are now normalized.

Faced with mass anger over social inequality, the ruling class increasingly leans on authoritarian measures to maintain its rule. This is why workers find themselves not just confronting greedy bosses, but a political system mobilizing police, courts, and immigration authorities against them.

The defense of immigrant workers, the fight for living wages, the right to organize—these are political questions that demand a political fight. The Teamsters bureaucracy is wholly incapable of waging such a struggle because they are tied by a thousand threads to the corporate state.

Workers cannot rely on the Teamsters bureaucracy to wage their fight. To win, they must immediately organize independent, democratically run rank-and-file committees that answer not to the union officials, but to the workers themselves.

These committees must take control of the contract negotiations, demand full transparency, and prepare for a strike on their own terms, not those dictated by a sellout leadership and a bloodthirsty corporation. Crucially, they must link up with workers at other CVS facilities and other sections of the working class engaging in similar struggles, such as the 55,000 Los Angeles County workers waging a similar fight?.

Above all, they must recognize that their struggle is political. Defending wages and rights cannot be separated from fighting against the broader assault on democratic rights by the Trump administration and the capitalist class it serves.

The CVS workers at La Habra must reject any sellout contract. They must organize rank-and-file committees, prepare for strike action, and link their fight to a broader movement against corporate dictatorship and political repression.



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