Teamsters proclaim "victory" at United Airlines while withholding contract from 11,000 mechanics

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29 July 2026

More than a week after the Teamsters proclaimed an "industry-leading" agreement in principle covering more than 11,000 mechanics and related workers at United Airlines, the union has still not released the proposed contract, a term sheet or even an official wage schedule.

Nevertheless, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) has already announced that it "fully recommends ratification" and has flooded social media with declarations that it took on one of the world's largest corporations and "won ... yet again!"

The contradiction is made more extraordinary by the Teamsters' own account. On July 20, while Airline Division representatives were still reviewing United's proposal, the company emailed workers claiming that an agreement had been reached. In an update dated July 21, Teamsters locals at San Francisco said negotiators had been only halfway through the proposal when United's message went out and that portions of the offer—including some of the provisions the company advertised as "highlights"—had not even been drafted. The update said the full committee would meet that day and promised another report afterward.

Yet by 6:36 p.m. Eastern Time on July 21, the International was publicly declaring the agreement in principle a "major victory" and fully recommending ratification, even as its own announcement acknowledged that the committee still had to finalize the language. Eight days later, the promised follow-up has not appeared, and members still have not received either a term sheet or the proposed contract.

The circumstances indicate the contract is a major sellout. If the agreement contained the enormous gains claimed by the Teamsters, the bureaucracy would publish the figures and language and trumpet them from the rooftops.

The Teamsters bureaucracy has disclosed only five talking points: an unspecified "industry-leading" wage increase; reduction of the progression to top pay from eight years to five; a $54 million signing bonus, advertised as $5,000 per worker; a two-year extension of the Retiree Bridge Medical Plan; and an expedited grievance and arbitration process.

Nothing has been said about the date-of-signing wage rates or annual raises, the duration or amendable date of the agreement, retroactive pay for the two years spent in negotiations, scope and outsourcing language, medical premiums and cost sharing, the Continental Retirement Plan, 401(k) contributions, profit sharing, shift differentials, holidays, Personal Convenience Leave or the disposition of outstanding grievances. Even the value of a two-year extension of retiree medical coverage cannot be assessed without knowing how long the contract will run.

The 19-to-12 vote by the bargaining committee to recommend the agreement is significant principally because it indicates that the apparatus anticipates intense opposition. Nearly two-fifths of the committee would not endorse a deal the International describes as an overwhelming triumph.

Opposition erupted immediately beneath the Teamsters' Instagram advertisement. One worker wrote: "11,000 mechanics haven't even seen the full contract and already want to vote no. The Teamsters and the negotiating committee are so out of touch it's insane. May as well start posting UAL ads on the Teamster Instagram at this point." Numerous comments simply called for a "no" vote.

Another worker wrote, "Touting a $5000 sign on bonus as a win while members lost around $25,000 in base pay over the nearly 2 yrs in negotiations is crazy." A third asked: "What are the said details of the T/A. Better 401k, holidays, medical?"

United mechanics overwhelmingly rejected a four-year extension in April 2024. In February 2025, the company returned with what the Teamsters described as a concessionary six-year package. According to the union's own bargaining update, United proposed date-of-signing wage rates identical to those in the rejected extension while rolling VEBA (Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association) payments into the wage scale.

That proposal would eliminate the Continental Retirement Plan and Retiree Bridge Medical coverage, eliminate the default PPO medical plan, shift healthcare cost sharing from 80/20 to 70/30, eliminate Personal Convenience Leave at every station and lengthen the progression to top pay. United wanted to eliminate existing base protections, refused to restore heavy maintenance lines and was outsourcing approximately 85 percent of heavy maintenance to foreign repair stations. Workers rejected the package by 99.5 percent.

As recently as April 2026, the Teamsters reported that United was pressing the union to withdraw Article 1 scope grievances headed for arbitration and had threatened to pause negotiations if the cases proceeded. In July, the committee acknowledged unresolved contract language and a dispute over the ratification bonus. These are precisely the questions the International has now buried beneath the phrases “clear job protections” and “industry-leading” gains.

Workers across the airline industry want to fight. In July 2025, 71 percent of flight attendants rejected a tentative agreement after five years without a raise. As for mechanics, in February 2016, more than 93 percent rejected United’s final offer, which would have established a lower wage and benefit scale for new hires, with starting pay in the low $20s compared with top pay of $46.15 and an eight-and-a-half-year progression.

United can easily afford major improvements. In the second quarter of 2026, the airline reported $17.7 billion in revenue, up 16 percent from the previous year, net income of $805 million and $19.6 billion in available liquidity. It raised its full-year earnings forecast even while projecting nearly $6 billion in additional fuel expenses. CEO Scott Kirby received $32.3 million in total compensation in 2025.

On Wednesday, Kirby appeared beside President Donald Trump at the White House for the announcement of a $22 billion reconstruction of Washington Dulles International Airport, United’s principal Washington hub. The project includes 5 million square feet of new or renovated space. United handles approximately 70 percent of Dulles traffic, and Trump said the carrier would partly finance the project, although its precise contribution has not been disclosed.

The airline industry is in the midst of a major global restructuring. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Sunday that Kirby approached Delta Air Lines in 2025 about combining the two most valuable US carriers. This followed Kirby’s attempt to merge United with American Airlines, an idea he pitched to Trump earlier this year. At the same time, United has scrapped plans to launch service from Chicago O’Hare to 10 regional airports after the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) extended caps on flights.

A sharp rise in fuel prices is intensifying the pressure for mergers, capacity reductions and higher fares across the global industry. The combined second-quarter fuel expenses of Delta, United, American, Southwest and Alaska were nearly $8 billion higher than a year earlier. United nevertheless says it expects to recover all of its higher fuel costs by the fourth quarter. Its yields rose 12 percent in the second quarter, and it now expects fourth-quarter capacity to be lower than currently published schedules, with further reductions possible if fuel prices remain elevated.

The Teamsters bureaucracy has a record of using contracts passed under false pretenses to pave the way for huge corporate restructuring. In 2023, a so-called “historic” UPS agreement which blocked a strike by 340,000 workers was followed by the “Network of the Future” program. UPS subsequently eliminated 48,000 positions and closed daily operations at 93 buildings in 2025. It has announced plans to eliminate up to another 30,000 jobs and close at least 24 more facilities in 2026.

Airline workers operate under the Railway Labor Act (RLA), which prevents them from striking until the National Mediation Board releases the parties from mediation—normally after an offer of binding arbitration is rejected—and a 30-day cooling-off period expires. During that period, the president may establish an emergency board, delaying strike action for roughly another 60 days.

The union apparatus does not fight this state-controlled system. It uses its endless procedures to isolate workers, suppress strike action and wear down resistance while the companies continue operating and accumulating profits. In 2022, Teamsters-affiliated railroad unions refused to call a legal national strike after workers rejected a deal brokered by the White House. Instead, they delayed long enough to give Congress the time it needed to pass legislation pre-emptively banning a strike and imposing the deal workers rejected.

United mechanics should demand the immediate publication of the complete agreement, every side letter, wage and benefit schedule and the disposition of all scope grievances. No vote should take place until workers have had adequate time to study and discuss the full language.

But workers cannot leave the conduct of the struggle in the hands of the officials who are already campaigning for ratification. Mechanics should organize a rank-and-file committee, independent of the Teamsters apparatus, to campaign for rejection of any agreement that fails to meet workers’ demands and to establish direct links with flight attendants, pilots, ground workers, UPS workers and airline workers internationally. The enormous power of workers who maintain and operate the global air transportation system must be mobilized on the basis of their own needs, not subordinated to corporate profitability.

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