

UPS workers' opposition grows to Teamsters' defiance of contract vote

By our reporters
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Anger is growing among tens of thousands of United Parcel Service (UPS) workers across the United States to the Teamsters union's decision to impose its sellout contract in defiance of last Friday's "no" vote by workers.

A clear majority of workers, over 54 percent, voted "no" on the contract. The Teamsters is utilizing an obscure and nakedly antidemocratic clause in its constitution that permits it to impose the contract if fewer than half the workers participate in the vote, unless a two-thirds majority votes "no." The Teamsters claims that 44 percent of workers participated.

Among workers there is widespread support for a fight. In the Teamsters union, UPS management, and the entire ruling class there is immense nervousness over the possibility of a rebellion by workers, under conditions of a growing mood of struggle among workers across the US and internationally. The corporate media has largely maintained silence on the Teamsters' repudiation of the vote, with the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other major publications failing to even mention it.

There are deep distrust and skepticism among workers about the officially reported figures for both the vote and the turnout. This was the first UPS contract during which the Teamsters utilized an electronic voting system requiring workers to vote on their computer or phone using a code sent to them by mail. Many workers have reported having never received their ballot code.

Tim, an air-driver in Michigan, told us yesterday, "I don't trust the electronic thing or them mailing it. Why can't we just hold a meeting at each hub and vote publicly? That would be more honest, and then we could all see the vote as well. They [the Teamsters] don't want that." Tim said "I'm paying my union dues

for these people, for them to disregard my vote. I wonder how much they're getting out of this?"

"I think we should all go on strike," he added. "I'm all for it. We all voted 'no' on the contract. If someone doesn't want to vote, it should be a dead vote. If I didn't vote for a US president, does my vote go to the incumbent? No. We voted for a strike and said 'yes' by 93 percent."

In Pennsylvania, Brad, a full-time feeder driver, said that of a group of 15 other drivers that he works with, only one received a ballot. "I didn't initially get a ballot," he said. "On the Monday after we were due to receive them, I had to contact the administrator at my local union. She said she put my name in the computer to get one. Then, when I didn't receive it, I had to speak to my local Teamsters Business Agent. After I spoke to him, I got one, but the others didn't. After that, we couldn't reach the business agent by phone."

Brad said on the Thursday before the vote, his coworkers posted a Facebook comment to the union that they still did not have their ballot, and were told to wait. "Then the polls closed. I think they were playing a game. And the people playing the game are getting paid by us. We all know the union dues are going up. You don't support us, but now the dues are going up."

On Friday night, Brad was watching the vote count announced live on video. He said, "When I saw the 'no' vote I called my friends and we said, 'We did it.' Then all of a sudden this came out. I called union officials. I was beyond shocked. I went from feeling ecstatic to within an hour beside myself and not knowing what to do. Before the vote came out, a lot of the workers were saying, 'strike.' Now the Teamsters is not even mentioning the word 'strike.'"

Sam, a first-year driver in California, told us that the Teamsters' disregard of the vote sets a precedent.

“Why are we even having negotiations at all? Why do we have a contract? Why do we have a vote? Why don’t they just have a handshake agreement between the company and the union?” He noted that after the Teamsters announced the 54 percent “no” vote, “UPS said it was planning to go back to the negotiating table. And it’s the Teamsters saying, ‘Actually, we’re happy with it.’”

Sam said he felt like “these guys [the Teamsters] just take my money and I don’t even know what they do with it. I’ve seen it time and time again since I started here that they don’t have my back, if I have a complaint about my route. I would not file a grievance, because then the union would file me as a whiner.”

To add insult to injury, on Sunday the union’s Package Division Director Denis Taylor said he would use the same obscure 30-year-old constitutional clause, requiring a two-thirds “no” vote to reject a contract if less than half the membership votes, to push through five of the ten local supplements that were also rejected by UPS workers. According to the union’s statutes, no National UPS Master Agreement can be implemented without the ratification of local supplements.

In 2013, however, the union bureaucracy, headed by James P. Hoffa, overrode local rejection votes based on another specious constitutional clause, which allows the union to amend the ratification process “if at any time it believes such action will be in the interests of the International Union or its subordinate bodies.”

In the face of growing rebellion by workers, the two loyal opposition factions within the union bureaucracy, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Teamsters United (TU) are desperately trying to contain opposition and shore up the discredited union.

In an October 6 statement, the TDU implores Hoffa—a notoriously corrupt union official who makes nearly \$400,000 a year, plus much more in perks—to call a General Executive Board of the union “to resolve this crisis.” Hoffa, they add, should “respect the majority vote of the members, remove Taylor as the union negotiator, return to the bargaining table, and order a contract vote once a new offer has been reached.” Any other outcome, the TDU, would “weaken our union.”

Similarly, Sean O’Brien (salary \$130,559) a former Hoffa backer who will lead the TDU-backed Teamsters United slate in the 2021 union election, sent a letter to

Hoffa and chief UPS negotiator Denis Taylor warning that the implementation of the rejected deal would lead to “political upheaval” in the ranks of union members, “both those employed by UPS and those employed by other employers.”

An official TU statement warns, “If Hoffa and Taylor impose contract givebacks that have been rejected by a majority of the members, they will betray every UPSer and send every Teamster the message that their voice and their vote doesn’t count.”

This message, however, has already been sent and it has triggered an avalanche of opposition from workers who correctly see that the Teamsters is nothing but a tool of corporate management. To take forward their struggle, workers must elect rank-and-file committees at every hub, which are independent of the union and democratically controlled by and answerable to workers themselves.

These committees should declare the bogus contract null and void and build up support for a unified struggle, including the preparation of a national strikes, based on their own demands to abolish all wage and benefit tiers, for a 30 percent across-the-board raise, and the right of all part-time workers to take on full-time positions with full health care and pension benefits. To strengthen this fight, UPS workers should reach out to UPS, FedEx, Amazon and other logistic workers, as well as teachers, steelworkers, hotel workers and other to prepare a common struggle.

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