

TDU, Teamsters United capitulate to Hoffa's override of UPS workers' "no"

By Jerry White
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The despotic move by the Teamsters leadership to override the "no" vote by United Parcel Service workers and impose a pro-company contract has provoked a firestorm of opposition among rank-and-file workers.

Last Friday, the union's National Negotiating Committee announced it would ratify a new five-year agreement for a quarter of a million UPS workers, even though workers voted to reject the contract by a 54 to 46 percent margin. In announcing the action, Package Division head Denis Taylor pointed to an obscure, 30-year-old clause in the Teamsters constitution requiring a two-thirds vote to reject a contract if fewer than half of the workers cast ballots.

Taylor then invoked the same anti-democratic provision to declare that five of the 10 local supplemental agreements rejected by UPS workers had also been approved. The passage of the supplementals is required before the UPS National Master Agreement can be implemented. However, in 2013, Teamsters President James P. Hoffa simply overrode local "no" votes by using another clause that allows the union to change the ratification process "if at any time it believes such action will be in the interests of the International Union or its subordinate bodies."

These actions have discredited the Teamsters in the eyes of workers. At UPS hubs across the country, workers are denouncing the union for vote fraud and discussing how to prevent the implementation of an illegitimate contract that maintains poverty-level wages for inside workers and includes a new lower-paid tier of "hybrid" package delivery drivers/warehouse workers.

To take forward the struggle, rank-and-file workers will have to take matters into their own hands.

The *World Socialist Web Site UPS Workers Newsletter* encourages workers to elect rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporate-controlled union, to declare the contract null and void and mobilize the united power of 250,000 UPS workers to prevent its implementation. These committees will serve as the organizational centers for building support and preparing the conditions for a national strike to put an end to tiered wages, secure a substantial wage increase and upgrade all part-time workers who so desire to full-time status.

The rank-and-file committees will reach out as well to other

sections of workers—logistics workers at Amazon, Fed Ex and the United States Postal Service; teachers; hotel strikers; steelworkers and autoworkers—to build a powerful counteroffensive against the giant corporations, the two big business parties, and the so-called unions that serve as their enforcers.

The Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Teamsters United (TU) have responded to the anti-worker coup of the union leadership by opposing any such action and instead telling workers to appeal to Hoffa to change course, fire Taylor, renegotiate the contract and organize a second vote.

If the stakes were not so high, this cowardly and bankrupt attempt to block a real struggle would be laughable! These "oppositional" groups are no less petrified of a movement of the rank-and-file than Hoffa. In their desperation to uphold the authority of the company union called the Teamsters, they are exposing themselves as secondary arms of the bureaucracy and UPS.

Neither the TDU nor TU did anything to warn and prepare workers for the theft of the ratification vote. On the contrary, they told workers that the defeat of the deal would persuade Hoffa, Taylor & Co. to go back to the bargaining table and negotiate a better contract.

After the National Negotiating Committee announced that it was defying the vote, the TDU, in a statement posted October 6, could muster nothing more than a mild criticism of Taylor, saying he "blindsided the members" and "created massive confusion by announcing that the UPS contract is ratified." The TDU statement implored Hoffa to call a meeting of the General Executive Board of the union "to resolve this crisis."

The TDU added, "If the Hoffa administration disregards the No Vote and ratifies the contract, it will be giving a gift to union-busters everywhere by telling workers inside and outside our union that Teamster leaders don't listen to the members." As if workers inside and outside the Teamsters did not already know that the union leaders are corrupt stooges of the corporations and contemptuous of the will of the rank and file!

This kind of talk is an insult to the intelligence of UPS workers. Hoffa, who is paid \$387,244 a year, plus whatever other income goes unreported, oversees an apparatus that dispenses millions of dollars in salaries to an army of union

bureaucrats.

A similarly pathetic statement was issued by international vice president and head of Teamsters Joint Council 10, Sean O'Brien, a former Hoffa supporter who is now heading up the Teamsters United ticket to unseat Hoffa in the 2021 union election. In a letter to Hoffa and Taylor, O'Brien urged the two chief conspirators not to declare the UPS contract ratified and instead to go back to the bargaining table and get a better offer. Like the TDU, the TU pleaded with Hoffa to convene a General Executive Board meeting to "discuss and advise" Taylor "as to the proper course of action to be followed."

The General Executive Board is made up of 26 hardened bureaucrats, including at-large vice presidents, regional vice presidents and international trustees, who make many times over what a UPS driver, let alone a part-time warehouse worker, earns.

O'Brien, a GEB member, collects \$130,559 in salary as an international vice president, \$20,000 as a member of Joint Council 10 and \$151,883 as president of Teamsters Local 25. His combined salary of \$302,442 is more than 10 times the \$27,040 a part-time warehouse worker would make if he or she worked 40 hours a week, every week of the year.

O'Brien concluded his groveling letter to Hoffa and Taylor by warning that their actions were creating "political upheaval within the ranks of IBT members."

Far from offering a way forward for UPS workers facing a contract that will open the way for the destruction of all decent-paying, stable jobs, both the TDU and TU are offering friendly advice to the gangsters at the top of the union to pull back from actions that threaten to unleash a movement of workers that will end the gravy train for all of them.

Both the TDU and TU are telling workers to wait until the union elections in 2021. Workers at UPS, the TDU declares, "can form the backbone of a grassroots campaign that can drive Hoffa out of office and elect new leadership that will fight the company and not the members."

But 40 years of experience with such "union reform" movements have demonstrated that reshuffling the personnel in the union bureaucracy will do nothing to change the nature of these organizations, which have long subordinated the interests of workers to the profit demands of the owners.

The TDU is a perfect example. In the late 1980s, it told workers the union could be democratized by collaborating with the Reagan and Bush administrations, which put the Teamsters under federal trusteeship on the pretext of rooting out the mafia.

Facing another upheaval of truckers, UPS workers and other Teamster members, the TDU filed a federal lawsuit to remove the hated constitutional clause that required a two-thirds rejection vote no matter how many workers voted. As part of the settlement of the lawsuit, the TDU accepted a modification of the constitution proposed by the General Executive Board whereby the two-thirds requirement would kick in if less than

50 percent of the workers voted. Speaking to the *Times* at the time, TDU head Ken Paff gushed, "We finally have majority rule in this union."

The TDU-backed president, Ron Carey, maintained the undemocratic constitutional clause, Article XII, Section 2(d)(2), throughout his term in office from 1991 to 1997, when he resigned in disgrace over a kickback scheme to finance his reelection campaign. Carey shut down the two-week UPS strike in 1997 after claiming that he had won 10,000 new full-time jobs. The new jobs, however, paid 24 percent less, and the contract he signed was the first to expand the two-tier system to full-time workers.

The treachery of the TDU has its roots in its rejection of any struggle to bring socialist consciousness into the working class in opposition to the pro-capitalist and nationalist program of the unions and their political subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party.

There is enormous opposition among UPS workers, who, like workers everywhere, are determined to recoup decades of lost wages and benefits and reverse the destruction of working conditions, even as corporations like UPS made billions in profits. The biggest obstacle to uniting workers is the trade unions, whose officialdom are part of the top 5 percent of income earners, and who are determined to defend their wealth against the struggles of the working class.

That is why workers must build new organizations, workplace and factory committees, independent of the unions, to link up the struggle of workers at UPS with workers throughout the country and internationally. The development of an industrial counteroffensive of the working class must be guided by a new, socialist political perspective, aimed at fighting for workers' power and the transformation of the giant corporations, such as UPS and Amazon, into public enterprises collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class.

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