

“We should all be fighting together”

Teamsters union isolates 8,500 Chicago UPS workers

By George Marlowe
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After defying the “no” vote by tens of thousands of United Parcel Service (UPS) workers and ramming through its sellout contract, the Teamsters union is isolating thousands of Chicago-area UPS workers determined to fight for higher wages and end the exploitation of part-time workers.

On October 5, the Teamsters announced it would impose its concessions contract on a quarter million UPS workers by using an antidemocratic constitutional loophole, permitting it to ratify the contract if less than half the membership votes, unless a two-thirds majority votes it down. Many workers have reported they never received a voting ballot.

The illegitimate contract creates a new tier of “22.4” package delivery/warehouse “hybrid” workers, who will be paid up to \$6 per hour less than current full-time drivers and can be forced to work on weekends. Part-time UPS workers, who constitute more than 70 percent of the workforce, will start on the poverty-level hourly wage of \$13.

Throughout this process, the Teamsters has isolated more than 8,500 UPS workers in the Chicago metropolitan area and 6,000 UPS workers in Illinois, Iowa and Indiana, who have been working without a contract.

While the Teamsters signed their first national contract in 1979, Teamsters Local 705 (covering the Chicago area) and Local 710 (covering workers spanning 150 miles across three states) signed separate contracts and continue to do so. The leadership of these locals claims that their separation from the national contract provides UPS workers with better conditions. In fact, the local contracts have always closely paralleled concessions made across the country. They

are always negotiated following the settling of contracts nationally, isolating this strategically critical section of UPS workers.

Bob, a Local 705 UPS worker at the gigantic Chicago Area Consolidated Hub (CACH), which employs 8,500 workers, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “They started negotiating our contract separately. Originally it was set up so that we could get a better deal than the national, but we never do... [The local] doesn’t tell us anything.”

Teamsters Local 705 is currently posturing as a militant local willing to oppose UPS. It has claimed it will oppose the imposition of a “hybrid” driver, fight for a \$15-an-hour part-time starting wage (a poverty-level wage that is now the starting wage for Amazon workers), increase pensions for retirees and improve the health care plans. It has claimed that it will not extend a contract for 30 days if these demands are not met and take a strike vote in early November, for a potential strike following the week after Thanksgiving.

This is a fraud. In the first place, the union has consciously delayed any strike authorization vote until after the imposition of the contract nationally, ensuring that Chicago-area workers are isolated from UPS workers across the country.

The Teamsters Local 705 in Chicago, as throughout the US, has a decades-long history of corruption and sellouts. In 2008, the local claimed it would go on strike, but never did, despite an overwhelming strike authorization vote. After 1997, under the “reform” slate of Jerry Zero, it imposed a new “combination” position with lower wages for warehouse workers, following the pattern set by the national contract.

The bulk of the CACH workers are part-time and

start out on as little as \$10 an hour. In 2013-2014, the union transferred workers to the TeamCare health fund, which is jointly controlled by UPS management and the union. While workers' co-payment charges have been increased as a result, the union executives have been able to secure control of a \$5 billion investment fund.

A small-sort UPS worker with 20 years at the plant told the WSWS, "We're getting the shaft. I don't go to any union meetings because I think it's bogus. I don't waste my time. We got shafted with the TeamCare insurance since the last contract. It sucks. They took away our fully covered insurance. With TeamCare, we're paying like 20 percent of the balance."

She added, "I had a mammogram, and it cost me out-of-pocket \$83. Most people here will tell you that they're upset with the union, if they're honest. We think they work for management more than us. They're not going to strike. We should not have separate contracts. We should all be fighting together. I think the '22.4' position is stupid. I don't think even \$15 is enough because they're making billions in profits."

There is enormous determination among workers to fight. Andres, a 21-year-old unloader, said, "I've been working here eight months. I make \$10.30 with some bonus, but that's not enough for the work we do. There's a lot of people who work so hard, and if you have to pay rent you can't survive on what I make. I live with my parents. If the corporations like UPS and Amazon are making billions in profits, why can't we get paid more? Their wealth comes from us."

Art, a combination worker with 20 years who does loading and small sort at night, said, "We deserve more money. The Teamsters sucks for ratifying the national contract. The union doesn't represent us. Back in the day when I was a steelworker, the unions didn't play."

John, a 25-year-old part-time loader who makes \$11 an hour, said, "We should be getting more than \$15 an hour. It's very hard work for the pay. I lift packages from 50 to 150 pounds every day. I see people get hurt all the time. We have insurance, but at the end of the day it's not enough to make a living. I just graduated college, and I have student loans. I live at home with my family. If you want to live on your own, you have to work two jobs or more. UPS keeps making profits from us. I don't think it's right, and the union doesn't really protect us."

The greatest obstacle to any struggle, however, is the Teamsters, which functions as an arm of UPS management. Leading Teamsters officials have incomes that place them in the top one to two percent of the population, including James Hoffa (salary almost \$400,000, top one percent) and Juan Campos, secretary-treasurer of Local 705 (more than \$235,000, top 2 percent). Campos' income is more than 20 times the lowest paid part-time workers. On average, the top union executives at Local 705 make over \$90,000 year, and the top 10 take in a combined \$1.4 million.

The Teamsters is relying on its loyal opposition in Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Teamsters United (TU) to control workers' opposition and prevent any rebellion against the union. In the lead-up to the contract vote, they claimed that a "no" vote would force Hoffa to "renegotiate" a better contract. Now, they insist that workers must sign petitions to Hoffa, urging him to change course. They are also promoting the illusion that Teamsters local 705 will conduct a struggle, which will pressure the Teamsters leadership to conduct a fight.

The WSWS *UPS Workers Newsletter* urges workers to reject this perspective. Instead, we call for the formation of new organizations of struggle, rank-and-file workplace committees, democratically and directly controlled by UPS workers, in every hub to coordinate opposition to the illegitimate contract.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>