

“Rather than strike, the union sold us out”

UPS workers in Rockford continue to speak out against sellout contract

By George Marlowe
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Workers at United Parcel Services (UPS) in the economically devastated Midwestern city of Rockford, Illinois, continue to speak out against the sellout contract imposed by Teamsters Local 710, an agreement that is largely indistinguishable from the concessions-filled national contract undemocratically imposed on 250,000 UPS workers last year.

The contract for Teamsters Local 710 covering 6,600 UPS workers in Illinois, Iowa and Indiana was declared ratified with nearly 60 percent abstaining from voting.

Teamsters Local 710 has negotiated separate contracts for nearly six decades alongside Teamsters Local 705, which covers more than 9,000 UPS workers in the Chicago area. The concessions in the Local 710 contract mirror the national contract and include the maintenance of poverty wages for part time workers, with the bulk expected to make a starting wage of \$13 an hour. The contract also includes the widely hated imposition of a two-tier system establishing a new category of hybrid warehouse/driver workers, many of whom will start at a lower wage than regular full-time parcel delivery drivers at UPS.

Such concessions were widely opposed; with more than 93 percent of the 250,000 UPS warehouse workers and drivers voting to authorize a strike. Instead of calling a strike, however, the Teamsters took a 54 percent majority ‘no’ vote and illegitimately imposed the sellout contract on UPS workers for five years, utilizing an obscure and anti-democratic constitutional loophole. The ramming through of the contract widely discredited the Teamsters and provoked an explosion of anger that continues to this day.

UPS workers across the country have spoken to the WSWs *UPS Worker Newsletter* about the company

reign of terror that prevailed following the imposition of the national contract. Workers faced grueling conditions during UPS’s most profitable peak season at the end of the year, followed by firings and layoffs of workers by management.

Conditions for Midwestern UPS workers are no different. Teamsters Local 710 utilized every method of dividing the workers, including creating a “Letter of Agreement” at the Rockford air hub which includes a \$15 an hour wage for workers with seniority—a poverty wage shared by many non-union Amazon workers across the country currently.

While UPS is estimated to have made more than \$7 billion in pretax profits last year (equivalent to nearly \$30,000 for every worker), it has imposed poverty conditions on UPS part-time and full-time workers.

The Teamsters have divided workers not only between cities, but also within every hub. The contract at Local 710 does not provide for any catch-up raises for existing part-timers. It has also allowed UPS to divide part-time workers through the use of temporary bonuses for some newer workers. Numerous workers have also been laid off following the ratification of the contract, while the union has not lifted a finger to protect them.

Alicia, a part time worker from Rockford, spoke to the WSWs *UPS Worker Newsletter* about her bitter experiences with UPS and the Teamsters union.

“The contract sucks for anyone who has been with UPS for more than a few years,” she said. “I don’t feel the union has done a good job educating people, they haven’t flexed muscle in handling the bonus payments, and they sold this contract as being so great and sent a letter with the voting instructions telling everyone they

recommend a ‘yes’ vote, which I think was very misleading.

“Rather than leveraging the strike authorization that was passed last year before peak season in order to gain some traction in negotiations and get demands met for a solid contract, they sold us out. I’m not generally one for conspiracy theories, but it would appear that UPS is lining the pockets of some key Teamster execs, and we as employees are paying the price.

“I imagine Hoffa and the higher-ups in the Teamster organization are getting some pretty nice under the table payouts when they save companies millions by selling garbage contracts.

“The union has really kept people in the dark about the settlement negotiations regarding the class-action grievance filed over the bonuses. It’s almost like they’ve only done lip service to fight it. We were told the company offered a low amount as a settlement, which the union refused, so now it’s in arbitration. In the meantime, we’re all resentful and skeptical that we’ll ever recoup anything.

“I feel UPS was hoping to drive out some of the veteran, higher paid workers in order to cut labor costs long-term. The bonus was a good way to sow discord among veterans and create confusion among the new employees. UPS wants people to be ignorant, and the union has done a poor job of educating people.

“I opposed the new contract in solidarity with my veteran coworkers who deserve catch-up raises, because their years of service shouldn’t be disregarded. UPS has shown us through the bonus payments and the lack of pay increases for long-term employees that our work and our time is not valued. The union did a poor job of informing people in the Rockford hub about the contract and the voting process.

“It doesn’t seem as if the union cares, and they’re allowing UPS to crap all over our contracts with no repercussions. Why would the company pay? They’ve proven they can do whatever they want and get away with it.”

Workers in the Rockford area confront low wage employment, backbreaking work and depressed economic conditions. Following the economic crisis of 2008, unemployment in Rockford reached a high of nearly 20 percent in 2010. Since then, while the official unemployment rate has edged back down, Rockford and the area surrounding it has become a center of

low-wage jobs and social devastation, similar to cities like Gary, Indiana, and Detroit, and vast swathes of the deindustrialized “Rustbelt” of the Midwest.

UPS workers like Alicia and others have spoken to the *WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter* about the physical and psychological demands they confront combined with the economic hardship of low pay and lack of full-time job opportunities.

However, for workers to secure higher wages, full-time employment, safe working conditions and more, they must organize workplace committees independent of the Teamsters. We urge UPS workers to form rank-and-file committees to oppose the illegitimate and sellout contracts and begin to mount an industrial and political counteroffensive, by linking up with striking workers in Mexico, teachers, autoworkers and other logistics workers in the United States and internationally.

The WSWS UPS Workers Newsletter urges workers to contact us today to learn more about forming rank-and-file committees.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>