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UPS Teamsters union struggle is critical for all workers

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Strengthen the union for this contract and the upcoming battle to save tens of thousands of jobs from automation.



340,000 workers, members of the Teamsters Union, worked tirelessly during the worst of the COVID pandemic. Despite exhaustion from overwork, disease, and family tragedies, they saved lives by delivering packages to those quarantined. Meanwhile, bosses at UPS lived in luxury as profits soared to \$56.3 billion from 2019

to 2023. In 2023 alone, UPS says it will spend \$3 billion in stock buybacks and \$5.4 billion in dividends. Every penny of that profit is due to the labor of the workers.

Teamsters union negotiators reject insulting UPS economic proposal

The current contract expires in less than five weeks. Every day the company delays making a realistic offer to the union, the closer workers come to a strike authorized by 97% of the rank-and-file who voted. The union has already achieved 55 tentative agreements on essential issues, including outfitting of new vehicles with AC and retrofitting others with fans; new protections against discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation; increased penalties to the company for wage theft, harassment, and working management; and a host of other items.

On Wednesday, June 21, the Union submitted a 23-page economic proposal on critical remaining issues, including base pay and catch-up raises, elimination of the two-tiered driver classification (22.4s), cutting out sub-contracting (to truck companies or personal vehicle drivers) and more full-time job opportunities for part-time workers who make up 65% of the workforce. UPS responded with “an appalling economic counterproposal,” according to Teamsters National Negotiating Committee.

UPS, know this: The union will strike on August 1 if necessary

CEO Carol Tome mistakenly believes she can become a capitalist hero and housebreak the Teamsters on behalf of billionaire UPS shareholders and Wall Street. But she has, in fact, lit a renewed fire. UPS will need to make significant offers to avert a strike.

Wall Street is watching - all unions need to join this battle

In the June 21 update by Teamster President Sean O'Brien and four rank-and-file negotiating team members, the union made the call to intensify unity and solidarity,

practice picket lines, identify strike captains, and get information out to all members.

The union has resisted pulling back despite Wall Street's tactic of threatening workers with a loss of jobs to other carriers. But this threat is, first and foremost, a problem for UPS if it loses a big chunk of the market share of logistics contracts.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT UPS TEAMSTERS

Individuals:

Call 404-828-6000, Extension 2 and tell UPS CEO Carol Tome that you support the Teamsters:

This is _____. I support the bargaining demands of the UPS Teamsters. They saved our lives during the pandemic. If there is a strike, I will demand that anything shipped not be shipped through UPS, and I will refuse delivery by any UPS vehicle.

Members of other unions:

Get resolutions of support from your union. Organize members to walk picket lines or any demonstrations. Refuse to cross any Teamster picket line. UPS workers are fighting for all of us. Donate to the Teamsters national or local strike fund.

Community groups:

Put out information on why you are supporting the UPS Teamsters. Come to picket lines and rallies. Gather supplies if workers ask for items to be brought.

Teamsters president denounces Supreme Court attack on the right to strike

On June 1, 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that a union can be held liable for damages caused by a strike. This judgment represents the strong drive by the capitalists—who control all branches of government—to destroy the most basic labor rights won through workers' struggle and sacrifice. They ultimately seek to undermine labor's right to carry out effective strikes that will economically injure companies. Immediately, Teamster President O'Brien shot back: "The Teamsters will strike any employer, when necessary, no matter their size or the depth of their pockets. Unions will never be broken by this court or any other. Today's shameful ruling is simply one more reminder that the American people cannot rely on their government to protect them. They cannot rely on their employers. We must rely on

each other. We must engage in organized, collective action. We can only rely on the protections inherent in the power of our unions.”

Strengthening the union by encouraging activism and rank-and-file involvement is on target — still more is needed in the locals

The Teamsters international union has continuously called for rank-and-file organizing, parking lot rallies, and education among the members. Rallies and trainings have taken place across the country, uniting workers of all nationalities, genders, and job classifications. Every worker, every steward, and every union local official needs to do all they can to ensure that members are getting information and otherwise prepare for the possibility of a strike. The UPS Teamsters app is helpful, but in many hubs, workers still don't know it exists. Many local officials and rank-and-filers are getting the word out while others resist.

Southern workers deserve equity in regional agreements

There are many Teamster regions in UPS, each with a contract supplemental to the national contract. The Southern Region is extensive, encompassing nine states. Regional negotiations have already resulted in tentative agreements that affect everything from vacations to pensions, grievances, sick pay, and PTO. A regional comparison of past supplemental contracts reveals a vast difference in these categories. For example, a worker in Northern California gains three weeks of vacation after three years of work. In contrast, a Southern worker must work ten years to get the same amount. These disparities are mainly due to unions' continued lack of attention to the South. Still, it also shows the need for more activity by the Southern Region leadership and some locals.

Southern workers will revive union militancy

Some locals in the South have been failing to enforce current contract provisions,

press grievances, or mobilize members. Unions in “right-to-work” states need to sign up new members, which many locals have neglected. Signing up new members this month is especially critical because workers who are not in the union will not get strike pay. Many workers—particularly part-timers—don’t know there is a union, much less what it does, what the contract is, or how a grievance is carried out. Most UPS workers are part-time, and many have second jobs. Now is the time to prepare workers to walk the picket line on their usual shift (if not more) and promote unity between workers with different job classifications and seniority levels. Rank-and-file members and stewards need to put in extra effort to organize, educate, and inspire their fellow workers in places where local leadership is apathetic or worse.

Strike solidarity is important and should be encouraged. But those doing it should try to understand the problems and uplift members’ leadership, not substitute for them. No union, however large or strong, can succeed in isolation. Done right, solidarity can help lift morale and provide material support.

A well-organized strike can create a revolution in class consciousness and class unity if it fosters worker leadership, especially among members who may be stepping into that role for the first time. A strike can also clear the path to a stronger union by shaking up the cozy relationships that sometimes develop between local officials and the company.

UPS is using automation (AI, robotics) and uberization to destroy jobs

Whether UPS workers strike or not, the efforts already made to strengthen the union are critical. This contract is only one battle in the class war that pits the workers against UPS and its government supporters.

In some places, UPS has imposed hiring freezes for new drivers, creating a situation where the company gets too many packages for the current fleet to deliver. UPS then hires personal vehicle drivers (PVDs) to fill in the gaps that the company has

created. PVDs make less and get no benefits while they pick up the costs for the upkeep and insurance of their vehicle. This Uberization is a major way for UPS to lower labor costs. They also want to subcontract to smaller trucking companies for the company-created overflow. A subcontracted company makes a profit while their drivers get much less than Teamster drivers, driving wages down across the industry.

The Teamsters Union has come to tentative agreements to prohibit the use of drones and driverless vehicles for the period of the next contract. But automation in the form of robotics and AI is already a significant threat to workers who sort and load packages. The union negotiated that UPS will notify them 45 days before any technological changes. This tentative agreement is good. But companies plan these changes for years, and UPS is likely looking to remove tens of thousands of inside workers who sort and load packages. The union needs to plan its offensive and lay the groundwork among the members to pursue new strategies to deal with this threat.

Unions need to find new ways to protect jobs and communities

Whatever you call it — AI, robotics, computerization, kiosks — it is all automation. The problem is not the technology itself. The problem is that we live in a capitalist system of private ownership of industry and business.

The capital used to retool and install new technology comes from the unpaid labor of the workers in the form of profits. The collective labor of the world's workers could be used to our collective benefit—to make unsafe jobs safer, lessen the burden of work, or shorten work hours while maintaining living wages. But under capitalism, we workers wind up financing the destruction of our own jobs.

The capitalist U.S. government—local, state, and federal—is dedicated to protecting private corporate property using our tax dollars. In May, the Biden administration

announced a \$140 million subsidy to launch seven new AI research centers.

Workers have a property right to our jobs by virtue of our labor

We must fight to declare that workers have a property right in our jobs. Through united collective action—work actions, occupations, or general strikes—we need to assert control over the technology that our labor creates.

Hundreds of thousands of workers lost jobs in the auto and steel industries due to high-tech automation. This meant the destruction of entire communities. Unions at that time thought that working with their bosses to impose tariffs on cars and steel imports was the answer. While that charade played out, the companies downsized, set tiered wages and benefits, and made joint agreements with automakers from abroad, who the capitalists had previously called the enemy. The enemy was at home. As fewer workers could purchase cars, all these companies turned to military contracts with their unlimited money and war profiteering gotten by looting the federal treasury.

The best way for the Teamsters to prepare for the struggles ahead is to step up what is being done now to strengthen union forces nationally and locally for the best possible contract and to work towards victory if it comes to a strike. Even if everything is not won, the effort to educate and inspire the rank-and-file to action will be necessary for the future.

Source: [Workers Voice](#)



<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2023/07/01/ups-teamsters-union-struggle-is-critical-for-all-workers/>