



NEW DAY AT UPS

NEWS FOR UPS WORKERS, BY UPS WORKERS!

THE POLITICS OF IBT LEADERSHIP AND THEIR TRADE UNION POLICY

by Frank Loder (WORMA)

Teamsters Internal Dispute on the Election

Unknown to most UPSers, over the last several weeks a split has emerged in the leadership of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters over the issue of the election and O'Brien's speech to the Republican National Convention. The IBT Executive Board has not endorsed a candidate yet, but VP John Palmer criticized O'Brien's appearance at the RNC in a letter stating his intention to run against him for General President. Locals 186, 572, and 848 endorsed the Harris/Walz ticket. This is important for the UPSers to note because fundamentally, this is not a split between different trade union policies: after all, Palmer and O'Brien were both elected on the same reformist state unionist ticket. It is a split between careerists over whether the UPSers should be tied to the Democrat or Republican party.

Teamster magazine—the closest thing the IBT has to a trade union publication—essentially advocates for both. They say Trump “pointed to persistent inflation as a detriment to any marginal gains achieved by workers to increase their wages,” talked a lot about “the threat he felt undocumented migrants posed to labor unions across the country,” and Teamster magazine goes so far as to claim, “The former President ultimately agreed with the Teamsters that antitrust enforcement should remain a top priority for labor unions and that the future organizing potential of the American labor movement appeared to be in strong shape for the long-term.” [Summer 2024 edition] It is telling that the Teamsters “ultimately agree” with Trump on the state and goals of the trade union movement. Biden (and Harris by proxy) on the other hand is praised for his supposed opposition to “right-to-work” laws and support for the PRO Act.

It's important to remember this when the campaigns for IBT office are in full swing: O'Brien and Palmer did not split over the line of the trade union struggle. They split over which imperialist party to seek the patronage of, Democrats or Republicans. Obviously we have no such split because we reject the elections in principle as contests for the redivision of loot—see the 19th edition of New Day at UPS for a full accounting of the relationship

of both political parties to UPS and the logistics industry as well as our resolution explaining why the election should be boycotted.

Teamsters Trade Union Policy: Capitulation Across the Board

The Teamsters are political scoundrels who want us to capitulate to the Democratic and Republican parties. But maybe they are strong trade-unionists in spite of this? No. They are ignoring or deliberately sabotaging the inside workers per usual, and have sunk to the level of “organizing” certain managers on the grounds that they are technical specialists. (Within a matter of weeks of organizing feeder managers at WORMA, one of them was doing union work inside the building!) The grievance process remains weak to nonexistent, with basically all of management doing union work in some capacity on a daily basis. Part time supervisors are routinely instructed by their superiors to break the contract and do so with no repercussions—such is the actual strength of the “historic victory” the Teamsters were all celebrating a year ago.

But maybe they take professional development seriously? Not at all. UPS has virtually abandoned training new hires altogether, as they have tried to cut management costs so much that the already limited number of training supervisors at WORMA are either forced to run belts or sent home when they hit their hour cap. New hires that don't speak English get no help. Existing employees have to deal with equipment that breaks down regularly or is pushed way past capacity, as UPS is trying to squeeze every cent out of its existing capital while it builds up new automated hubs. Supervisors are poorly trained, new hires are poorly trained, equipment is trash, upper management has no professionalism (I recall one full time manager recently yelling about how loading “sounds gay” while loading) and they run the operation according to their own taste, often explicitly undermining the contractual rights of the UPSers. (Including by introducing and discarding rules at random, for instance, the talk of enforcing dress code rules at WCHNC.) Larger issues in the logistics industry like automation or triple-towing—and just last month there was an accident that killed two

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people on I-44 in Oklahoma after a UPS truck pulling three trailers stalled on the highway, as well as yet another driver death from heat exhaustion in Texas—are systematically ignored by the IBT. In fact, the IBT flat out lied all last year about AC. (For instance, “Teamsters Secure Air Conditioning for UPS Fleet in Major Tentative Deal” from a June 2023 press release.) A basic feature that has been standard in automobiles since the late 60s is still not in UPS trucks in spite of numerous heat-related deaths and accidents—and of course climate control for the inside workers was never an issue for the IBT at all—because this would be a minor expense that eats into UPS’ profits. The Teamsters can’t have that!

But at least they are serious defenders of existing assets? Also no. A brief glance at any Teamster local’s Department of Labor disclosure forms from any year shows reckless spending on all sorts of things that have absolutely nothing to do with trade-unionism. On the macro-level, over the last decade the IBT recorded over \$2 billion in revenue. A measly 14% of this was spent on strikes, compared to 24.9% spent on “representational activities”, 11.7% on administrative costs, 4.6% on lobbying, and 12.7% on purchases of investments and fixed assets. (See “Political Economy of the American Labor Movement” from the New Labor Press for more info on profiteering in the trade union movement.) Not only are dues squandered, but jobs are squandered too, with UPS carrying out layoffs all over the country right now as it automates and consolidates operations. Even other assets, like insurance plans, are allowed to drop services at their own discretion. The pension funds have always been underfunded, but New England is particularly laughable as it has been in “critical and declining status” for years and got bailed out last month to the tune of \$5.7 billion. It was reported that, “White House ARPA coordinator Gene Sperling said the workers were facing pension cuts of 50-75%.” [“White House announces \$5.7B to shore up pension fund for New England Teamsters”, WMUR] Even in between sellout contracts, the value of our jobs is eroded in a number of ways, such as through speedups and inflation, that the Teamsters simply do not organize against.

Perhaps it would be objected that the Teamsters officials are doing their best in the face of extremely unfavorable external conditions and subjective difficulties regarding membership apathy. This also is a lie. The IBT is merged with the government at the highest levels. The current General President threatened members of 251 on video a decade ago for putting up a reformist candidate against the “chosen” IBT candidate, the Teamsters do not self-criticize for profiteers (especially organized crime which has been a known issue in the IBT for decades), and there are strict limits on member participation enforced by limits on the number and powers of the stewards. It’s not an issue of the UPSers hating trade unionism and loving the Democrats and Republicans, and the IBT leadership has no choice but to carry out their illogical wishes; quite the opposite.

Why We Don’t Run in IBT Elections

The backwards political line of the IBT has led to the complete liquidation of trade union organizing at UPS. We propose a slowdown to jointly resolve the numerous and expanding problems at UPS (and the logistics industry at large) during the contract period. The Teamsters propose nothing because they fundamentally reject the trade union struggle. For us, it is a question of figuring out what demands unite the various job classifications and regions and how to organize the unorganized UPSers, who make up the vast majority. (In our view, a shop committee system should be built up to on the basis of organizing a slowdown. That way, even if the majority of UPSers are not prepared for economic action, the minority that is ready can be consolidated into a stable body going forward.) For the Teamsters, it is a question of keeping a lid on things at least until they set up an alternative revenue stream at Amazon.

This is why we do not run in IBT elections and do not propose such a thing as a way to advance the trade union struggle at UPS. In our view, it would be counterproductive to exploit support in order to win an election that would result in nothing but a payday for ourselves and not actually raise the collective trade union organization of the UPSers. We do not know of a single example of a reformist ticket winning an IBT election and rapidly developing the trade union organization of UPSers on that basis. This is because it is a practical and theoretical impossibility: the IBT is opposed to trade union organizing at UPS and if a trade-unionist won an election, the local could simply be placed in trusteeship or the elected person could be sabotaged in any number of ways. Instead of waiting until we are able to win seats in the IBT, and then waiting for the General Executive Board to okay an advance in the trade union struggle, and then hoping the government doesn’t force an arbitration decision on us, we go directly to the UPSers. The logistics workers are the decisive factor in the trade union struggle, not the Teamster bureaucrats.

Incidentally, none of this is new or unique to us. UPSers figured out as far back as the 1970s that the IBT is a dead-end for the trade union struggle. (See New Day at UPS #15 and #16 for more information on the wildcat strikes at UPS and the reactionary role of Teamsters for a Democratic Union as a way to funnel trade-unionists back into the IBT.) The larger scale the Teamsters’ trade union policy is carried out, the larger the defeats for the trade union masses. The Teamsters deny that the trade unions have any professional or political obligations to the members and capitulate to the employers on everything. Therefore, it would be a contradiction for any principled trade-unionist to seek office in the IBT. So long as they are carrying out a policy of weakening and destroying trade union organization in the logistics industry, there is no reason for us to seek jobs in the IBT.

In the next edition, we will discuss recent trade union developments at Amazon and the revisionist campaign to bring the Amazon workers into the IBT.



New Day is a newsletter produced by UPS workers to rally our coworkers against UPS corporate and their agents in the Teamsters. New Day Committees are for gathering information and disseminating the basic outlook of the revolutionary UPS workers to the rank and file in the operation, as well as a base that our coworkers can use as a launchpad for campaigns around more immediate issues. Our long-term goal is the creation of a revolutionary industrial logistics union.