



NEW DAY AT UPS

NEWS FOR UPS WORKERS, BY UPS WORKERS!

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT UNION DEMOCRACY

by Frank Loder (WORMA)

In light of the upcoming steward election in WORMA, and the general election in the IBT, it is worth re-examining the issue of democracy in the labor movement at UPS. (For more information on the general election, there is a flyer on the 2026 Teamsters election in the Supplementary Materials at newdayarchive.wordpress.com.) There are any number of utopian ideas about democracy in the labor movement. Let us examine a few.

The most common misconception is that elections equals democracy, and that the way to “democratize” the existing unions is to replace appointed positions with elections. The issue with this view is that an election alone says nothing about the actual work being done by the office that is up for election. For instance, the General President of the Teamsters has unilateral power to make political donations up to \$25k for any single transaction according to Article 6 section 9 of the IBT constitution. So even though the General President is elected, and the office is charged with making political donations, there is nothing democratic about it: the GP has the ability to singlehandedly dictate the political allegiance of the IBT. There is no ability to elect a more democratic decision-making process concerning political donations—the election is to decide who is going to lord over the UPSers. Not to mention the fact that any election process itself is subject to a number of undemocratic rules aimed at hindering mass participation—for instance, requirements to be certified as a candidate, rules on voter eligibility, circumstances of when and where voting is to be conducted, etc. In reality, a vote means nothing if the minority can just ignore the decision of the majority as is the case in the Teamsters. No matter how many UPSers vote in favor of a strike, there will always be some reason it doesn’t happen.

Contrast the upcoming WORMA steward election with what New Day at UPS advocates. This election is for a steward who is supposed to be the representative of about a hundred people and who will have no right to organize a work stoppage according to article 4 of the contract. Essentially, the steward system restricts union representation to an absurdly low proportion of representatives to workers and strips them of all the normal responsibilities of a union organizer anyway. This is in contrast to the shop committee system outlined in the UPS Shop Committee Manual, which—if the UPSers were organized to their full potential—would provide a union representative for every work area with the ability to organize a vote on any major issue confronting the UPSers.

Another common misconception is that democracy comes from “the grassroots”, or in other words, from an increase in rank-and-file participation. The idea is that the more people participate in an

organization, the more pressure will be put on that organization’s leaders to meet the demands of the participants. It is sometimes expressed in the formula “change comes from the bottom-up.” But this is just flat-out wrong. It’s an application of the trickle-down theory of economics (which is also wrong) to power. It is meant to keep people fiddling around on the margins of the labor movement instead of striking at the heart of the issue, at state power. When the government wants to shut down a strike, or a business wants to prevent a union certification, they don’t “get involved at the grassroots”: they send the National Guard or the police to beat up workers or go to the courts to get an injunction.

A third misconception is that democracy is something that must be installed and maintained by force. As ridiculous as this idea sounds, this is in fact what happened to the Teamsters, i.e. the government used law enforcement to intervene in the union and subsequently oversaw elections that met their arbitrary standards. People who believe this generally believe that “human nature” or some other metaphysical force makes genuine cooperation impossible. This view basically hinges on ignoring all the facts about the people who are supposedly maintaining democracy. For instance, in the IBT, the Independent Investigations Officer is Robert Luskin, an attorney from Paul Hastings LLC, the same firm that employs Brad Bondi, the husband of current Attorney General Pam Bondi who is now notorious for her coverup of the Epstein criminal enterprise. The original 1989 settlement that established government control over the Teamsters resulted in William Webster being put on a three-man review board responsible for cleaning up the Teamsters. Webster was formerly the director of the CIA, the FBI, and served on the boards of Anheuser-Busch (which has a Teamsters contract) and the Pinkerton Security and Investigations Services, a mercenary army known for shooting strikers. The idea that these people have anything to do with “democracy” is just ridiculous. Thinking these people have set up “democracy” in the IBT is the labor equivalent to thinking the Bush administration invaded Iraq for “democracy”.

Yet another misconception is that democracy means formal equality—for instance, equal voting power, equal opportunity to run for office, and so on. The problem with this is that equal privileges for unequal people just reproduces that inequality. If I have a million dollars, and you have ten dollars, and we are both “equal” in our right to make political donations—obviously I am one-hundred-thousand times more influential in spite of our “equality”. In union elections, this is a problem when incumbent union officials make many times more money than the average worker, have much greater access to the media through established contacts, and are able to control the flow

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of information and ballots surrounding elections. Even though Sean O'Brien and any UPSer both possess a single vote, obviously O'Brien benefits from much higher pay and political and media connections that make "equality" between him and the average UPSer a joke.

The fact is there is no such thing as "pure" democracy. Therefore advocating "democracy" in the abstract is a nonsensical position in the labor movement. For fifty years Teamsters for a Democratic Union has advocated "democracy", and this led them to "democratically" elect the dictatorial O'Brien administration. Firstly, real union democracy requires persuasion, not compulsion or deception, as an organizing method. There cannot be democracy where people are being coerced into supporting a union. This is why organizations like TDU—which conceal their views from the UPSers and support things like obligatory dues and closed-shop policies—are actually anti-democratic elements in the labor movement. Secondly, it requires team work in service to shared class interests, not scheming for personal benefit. Plenty of people say they "support" the labor movement. But it's easy to "support" a movement if that movement is understood only as, "I get free stuff at no risk to myself." There needs to be some substance to the election other than deciding who gets to enjoy the spoils of winning the election.

The central issue is not whether or not a union is "democratic". The question is what political party does a union follow and what class does that party represent? The reason the Teamsters are not a democratic union is because they follow the Democratic and Republican parties, and neither of these parties have a vested interest in expanding democratic rights of working people.

WORMA Manager Termination Exposes Weakness of Grievance System

In late February, a night sort coordinator was terminated by UPS. New Day at UPS agrees with the decision to terminate this coordinator's employment, however, the way it was done exposes how much of a joke UPS' management standards and disciplinary process is.

This manager was employed by UPS for many years. Over the course of his career, he committed contract violations on a daily basis for years, an unknown number of which were filed as grievances by hourlies. In addition to this, he was highly inappropriate in his personal relations with other employees, hourly and management. And on top of that, he was also just bad at his job. This all went on for years with no discipline handed down. The union let him get away with it in spite of the mountain of grievances this guy generated because according to the contract, personnel decisions are left entirely up to UPS, and nobody in a position of responsibility in the union wanted to push the issue. The coordinator's manager endlessly looked the other way because he committed some of the same violations.

So what changed? What changed was someone higher up happened to see an extremely racist Facebook post from the coordinator. Grievances, harassment, incompetence—that won't get you fired at UPS. That's all fine. What gets you fired is ignorant social media posts that could make the company look bad! What should have been done is simple: progressive discipline for managers that can't follow the contract or do their jobs correctly, and if they legitimately are incapable of being a full-time manager, then demotion. Instead, UPS does what every company does: sweep problems under the rug as long as possible, let people fail upwards, then once you have a pote man

Gig Workers' Organization Affiliates to New Labor Organizing Committee

In February, the new labor organization Gig Worker (U.S.) affiliated to the New Labor Organizing Committee. This organization is chiefly concerned with uniting the tens of millions of gig workers in the US, such as those employed by Uber and Doordash, around the New Labor line. The #BrequeDosApps (#AppBrake) movement in Brazil and the recent mass gig workers strike in India are indicative of the colossal potential power of these workers, who in the US are estimated to earn a median wage of only about \$5/hour after expenses. Doordash has a quarterly revenue of \$2 billion and Uber currently has a market capitalization of about \$200 billion. These figures are indicative of the extreme exploitation this chunk of the workforce lives under. At the same time, these workers are denied basic legal rights enjoyed by most employees thanks to backwards labor law which wrongly classifies them as "independent contractors". For more information on organizing gig workers, read "Outline for a Class-Conscious Gig Workers Movement" at newlaborpress.org or visit gigworkerus.org to help organize.



Gig workers in Hyderabad in India, affiliated with the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union, strike for better pay and working conditions



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.