

“We have no choice but to organize independently”

Costco worker urges coworkers to vote NO on Teamsters sellout deal

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Costco workers: Tell us how you're voting on the deal and why by filling out the form below! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

A letter released by the Teamsters to Costco workers announcing “highlights” for a contract covering 18,000 workers has produced enormous outrage. The contract proposal was used to block a strike which would have begun on February 1.

Several workers learned about the letter through the *World Socialist Web Site* and are furious for not being notified by their own union. Many others never received it, nor are they aware of its content, which reveals the treacherous role of the union in its attempt to ram through a sellout deal as quickly and as invisibly as possible.

As of this writing, no further information has been published about the tentative agreement, nor is it known when a vote might take place.

The WSWs spoke to Eric, a Costco worker in Los Angeles who felt “really disheartened” by the union’s attempt to betray its members.

WSWS: Did you hear from your union about the tentative agreement?

ERIC: I have yet to receive a ballot with any information about the tentative agreement. Teamsters’ communication is non-existent. The less people know, the less likely they are to reject the contract or vote. I mean, it feels like an inside job, you know. At this point, it is pretty safe to say that Teamsters is a bureaucratic entity that is too afraid of rocking the boat. To be honest, this is pretty standard. This is the kind of spineless deal we’ve come to expect from them.

The last one three years ago was equally dry and uninspired. And this time around, I think the

expectation was that they would do something to address the massive rise of cost of living over the last several years. But no, this is exactly what they’ve done time and time again, deliver basically the least amount possible. A dollar raise might have been a lot back when everyone was making \$10 or \$15 an hour, but when we’re already making roughly \$29 to say, oh, here’s \$30, that’s 3 percent, the average rate of inflation in a healthy economy.

Obviously, this is not a healthy economy... So people who vote yes to a dollar raise year over year are essentially agreeing to losing money to inflation, to losing buying power as an American participating in our economy. And for that, it’s really disheartening.

WSWS: Are you voting NO?

ERIC: I am voting no, and have already convinced many of my colleagues to vote no as well ... spreading dissent is still worth it.

WSWS: What is your understanding of the “Peace Labor Agreement” provision?

ERIC: It’s incredibly vague. If I had to guess, it would just be a means to expand the bureaucratic reach of Teamsters. You know, it’s almost a tacit agreement to be complicit in Costco’s plundering of their labor force in exchange for Teamsters having an easier time adding to their membership. A handshake agreement to say, “we won’t rock the boat too hard as long as you allow us to expand our user base and collect more union dues.” A pretty explicit sign that they are somewhat in bed together, that they are benefiting mutually off of each other.

WSWS: What do other workers say about Teamsters?

ERIC: I have never heard my fellow employees

speaking so terribly about Teamsters. Over the last several days, I've heard multiple employees talk about how if they were to call a vote to dissolve the union and to completely leave the union, that they would vote yes. It's gotten to the point where people are starting to question why we even pay our union dues if Costco is just going to give us the same thing as everybody else.

WSWS: What are your thoughts about Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien?

ERIC: I have a large problem with Sean O'Brien, the way that he's run the organization. You see him starting podcasts to increase his own clout. He wants to paint himself as this bulldog for labor rights, but it's very clear that, if you take this CBA as any indication, he's really just a "golden retriever," and that he is completely because it's going very well for him.

WSWS: What has been workers' direct experience dealing with the union?

ERIC: Every time we have an issue with Costco and we go to the union, they essentially tell us like, hey, there's nothing we can really do. I remember one time during COVID, Costco attempted to reprimand a coworker for following a state issued mandate to quarantine. He had a roommate who had tested positive. He was waiting for his own results to see if he was clear or if he was compromised. And so he called out.

And the next day when he went in, they attempted to write him up. And he said, "you can't write me up simply for following a state issued mandate." To ignore that would be to risk the health of all of us coworkers. They told him, "We don't care." He refused to sign a write-up and every day when he clocked in, they'd bring him to the office and say, "you got to sign this" and he said, "I'm not going to."

And so he went to our union representative, another "golden retriever." He said, "I'll see what we can do. I'll meet with the general manager." And after a few days he said, "I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do. You're going to have to sign it." And so he actually had to go to the California Labor Board and it went to trial. And within the first five seconds of the trial, the lawyer that Costco had hired conceded the case instantly.

He said, "the defendant is right. We will be withdrawing from this case and the defendant can expect that we will pay him for his time." At that point,

we knew that our own union representation was a farce. It was a joke.

This was actually maybe a year and a half into the COVID pandemic. At this point, we had already lost numerous coworkers to the virus. To completely ignore the state-issued mandate to quarantine was not only irresponsible, it was essentially a slap on the face to those who had died to COVID and the families who had lost their loved ones to people who definitely got it from work.

WSWS: We are fighting to build Rank-and-File Committees to help workers fight independently of the bureaucracy that betrayed them. What do you think about that?

ERIC: I agree wholeheartedly. One thing that has completely baffled me about having been in Teamsters for years now is that laborers and unions rely on the ability to organize, and yet Teamsters creates almost no ability for us to organize. We don't have meetings. Everything is discussed behind closed doors by union leadership. There's almost no communication at all amongst individual members. It almost feels like to even talk about unions while on the clock is against the rules.

We've gone to our union steward at Costco week after week asking, "hey, what's going on?" And they have absolutely no clue. And so it feels like that is clearly by design because our ability to communicate and organize clearly uncovers the flaws within Teamsters as an organization. We have gotten to the point where we have no choice but to organize independently and realize that the chains that bind us are actually being put on us by the organizations that are meant to free us, to liberate us.



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