

How Jacobin and the Democratic Socialists of America aided the Teamsters' betrayal of the Hunts Point market strike

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Last weekend, the Teamsters union forced through a sell-out contract to end a six-day strike by 1,400 workers at the Hunts Point produce market in the Bronx in New York City. Workers who struck for a modest \$1 per hour raise per year, were left with an average annual wage increase of 62 cents more for new hires and 40 cents for veteran workers over the next three years. Most of the wage increase, moreover, is offset by reductions in their health care benefits.

The deal was passed in a snap ratification vote engineered by the Teamsters who told workers to vote on a three-year deal that they did not see or have a chance to discuss. Workers were not even allowed to keep the single-page “highlights” distributed by Teamsters officials. The Teamsters union, which has over \$419 million in assets according to its 2019 Labor Department filing, did not pay a dime in strike benefits to Hunts Point workers. Facing economic hardship and knowing full well that the union would not fight for any better contract terms, the workers voted to end the strike and get back to work.

The strike itself was an initial expression of the immense radicalization of the working class amidst the homicidal response by the ruling class to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the danger of dictatorship and war. Set in the center of international finance capital and at one of the largest food produce markets in the world, the strike immediately provoked enormous alarm within the ruling class. After the strike was announced in a press conference that prominently featured Democratic Party officials, the Democrats showed their real face when the administration of Mayor Bill de Blasio sent riot cops from the New York Police Department on January 18 to ensure that scabs could enter the market and operations be continued. Several workers were arrested.

The major concern of Local 202 President Daniel Kane Jr., the Teamsters bureaucracy and the Democratic Party was to keep the strike contained and to shut it down before it became a rallying point for a counter-offensive of the working class throughout the city against the criminal response of the corporate and political establishment to the pandemic.

Of the 3,000 workers at the market, only 1,400 were called out on strike, while the United Food and Commercial Workers union kept its members working in the fish and meat markets. No appeals were made to other sections of workers even though the eyes of millions of workers throughout New York City, the US and internationally were set on the strike.

However, the union would not have been able to push through this betrayal without the assistance from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and especially Democratic Congressman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Throughout the strike, *Jacobin*, which is closely associated with the DSA, effectively functioned as the press agency for the Teamsters, promoting the illusion that the Teamsters union and the Democrats were

standing on the sides of the workers.

While the DSA was welcomed with open arms by the gangsters of the Teamsters bureaucracy, the union dispatched its goons against supporters of the Socialist Equality Party speaking to striking workers and collecting interviews for the *World Socialist Web Site*. This is because the Socialist Equality Party consistently warned workers about the impending betrayal and urged them to form rank-and-file strike committees to defeat the Teamsters sellout.

Jacobin on the other hand proclaimed the Hunts Point strike “a victory worth celebrating and proof that going on strike works.” Another DSA associated publication, *Labor Notes*, headlined its article, “In a Six-Day Strike, Bronx Produce Workers Doubled Their Raise and Inspired New York.” The latter article paid particular tribute to DSA: “Major support came from the NYC Democratic Socialists of America, which set up a table to keep the strikers fed and warm, and collected donations totaling more than \$31,000 that went to things like firewood, hand warmers, and hot food.”

The sellout at Hunts Point is only the latest in a string of betrayals dressed up as “victories” by the DSA and the pseudo-left. It still celebrates, for example, the 2012 Chicago teachers strike as a model “victory,” which in reality was a sellout by the Chicago Teachers Union which paved the way for dozens of school closures. While they similarly endorse the unions' sellouts of the 2018 wave of teacher strikes, they were initially caught flat-footed in West Virginia when teachers rejected a deal which the DSA had hailed as a “victory” and remained on strike for another week.

Now, under the Democratic Biden administration, as millions of workers have been radicalized by the pandemic, the massive transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top, and the threat of fascist dictatorship, the DSA assumes the critical role of providing the efforts of the Democrats and the trade unions to suppress the class struggle—if necessary, by brute force—with a “left” cover.

In its first article on the strike on January 19, *Jacobin* did little more but summarize statements by union officials. The publication also claimed that \$1 an hour more would make for a “livable wage” for workers in New York City who now earn as little as \$18 an hour. *Jacobin* thus effectively echoed the line of the unions that workers living in a city that is home to the largest number of billionaires in the world should be content with a few more crumbs from the table.

As the strike continued and received growing support among other sections of workers, Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the DSA, was called in to prop up the union on January 20, the day of the inauguration of Joe Biden as President. On the picket line, Ocasio-Cortez made populist appeals to the social discontent of the workers, while insisting that the union was the vehicle for their aspirations, shouting: “New York City is a

Teamsters Town!”

On Twitter, she celebrated the inauguration of President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris while promoting material by the New York DSA and the Teamsters on the Hunts Point strike. That same day, the unions and the market’s management returned to the negotiating table.

On January 21, *Jacobin* published an article, “As Joe Biden Takes Office, Labor Marches On.” The article enthusiastically promoted the appearance of Ocasio-Cortez and other Democratic Party figures such as mayoral candidate Andrew Yang, who cynically used the picket line as a campaigning ground. The article provided a round-up of statements by Ocasio-Cortez and the unions in New York and the teachers’ union in Chicago, suggesting that with Biden in the White House there was now “a president sufficiently determined to at least appear pro-labor.”

The policies which *Jacobin* refers to as “appearing pro-labor” are, in actual fact, moves by the Biden administration to enlist the even closer involvement of the trade unions in enforcing and legitimizing efforts to keep the economy open in spite of mass infections and death and in the face of growing anger from the working class. By proclaiming Biden to be “pro-labor” under conditions where both his administration and the unions support school reopenings and rejects any further lockdowns to control the pandemic, they demonstrate the complete opposition of social interests between the workers and what is falsely called the “labor movement.”

Jacobin and the DSA passed over, as though it were of no significance, the decision by de Blasio to deploy riot cops against the Hunts Point strikers. Nor do they point to the role of the Democratic Party in overseeing the coronavirus disaster in New York City, where 26,000 people have so far died. Both the mayor and Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo reject further lockdowns, in the world’s wealthiest city where Wall Street has made trillions during the pandemic, as “too expensive.”

In reality, the strike is a preview of the lineup of social and political forces in the social struggles on the horizon, which will take the form of a showdown with the entire political establishment, both the Republicans and the Democrats, which includes the DSA itself.

This conflict is driven not by the subjective calculations of Biden or anyone else, but the fundamental breakdown and crisis of the world capitalist system. If the Democrats as well as Republicans pursue the policy of “herd immunity,” sacrificing hundreds of thousands of lives to prop up profit margins and share values, it is because the ruling class, having built up the largest speculative bubble in history which even they can no longer control, cannot accept any other outcome. Even slight moves by Biden towards “inflationary” policies—that is, economic relief for workers impacted by the pandemic—could trigger a massive crash in the stock market.

The same class logic drives the DSA and the pseudo-left as a whole, based not on the working class but more affluent sections of the middle class, further to the right. Last year, *Jacobin* published an interview advocating “herd immunity” with a medical “expert” who later traveled to the White House to meet with Trump administration officials. Meanwhile, significant sections of the pseudo-left, including YouTube personality Jimmy Dore, are openly courting elements within the far-right as potential allies.

The contempt and hatred of the DSA for workers is expressed above all in its disdain for political clarity based on a socialist perspective. Their role in Hunts Point, when Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA passed out pizza to strikers as the union announced its sellout deal had been reached, recalls the cynical comment of *Jacobin*’s editor Bhashkar Sunkara in 2019 that the “The DSA and the ISO [the now defunct International Socialist Organization] sending tacos to striking teachers is pretty good. But the SEP [Socialist Equality Party] is sending them the correct program, and let’s not forget that’s the most important thing.” While the statement sought to ridicule the idea that workers need a political program for their

struggles, it accurately reflected the class gulf dividing the DSA—which speaks for privileged layers of the middle class that are tied to the union bureaucracy and Democratic Party—and the Socialist Equality Party.

Whereas the DSA uncritically reprinted and retweeted union statements, collected money for a strike fund workers never received, and brought them pizza, the *World Socialist Web Site* became the main source of daily news about the strike, warned of a betrayal by the union, and outlined a fighting perspective for workers, independent from the trade unions and the Democratic Party. It called for the formation of rank-and-file committees that would take the leadership of the strike out of the hands of the unions and fight to broaden it to other sections of the working class.

While the Teamsters tried to physically intimidate a reporting team of the WSWS and prevent it from speaking to workers on the picket line on January 19, the SEP refused to be intimidated and intervened in the strike on a daily basis and produced several videos about the strike. In fact, it was only after the SEP intervened and covered the strike that Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA launched their media offensive to prop up the Teamsters on January 20 in an effort counteract the influence of the WSWS.

That same day, the New York City Educators’ Rank-and-File Safety Committee countered these efforts by passing a resolution urging that the strike be broadened. Before the contract vote on Saturday, January 23, the SEP published a statement in both English and Spanish, calling upon workers to reject the sell-out contract, and fight to continue and broaden the strike.

The Hunts Point market strike marks just the beginning of much broader struggles by the working class in the US and internationally. In Chicago, the country’s second largest school district, teachers voted to go on strike. In Matamoros, Mexico, hundreds of striking workers have defied threats by the union, police and National Guard. It is critical that workers now draw the necessary lessons from this political experience.

The class lines are clear: the Socialist Equality Party, the WSWS, and the workers are on the one side of the barricades, and the capitalist state, the Democratic Party, the DSA, and the unions are on the other. We urge the many workers who have followed this strike and our coverage to contact us today to build independent rank-and-file committees and to join the SEP. This is the only path forward to prepare for the immense struggles ahead.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact