

Left Voice's campaign for unionization at Amazon: A pseudo-left cover for a Democratic Party operation

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Nearly 6,000 Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama are currently voting on whether to bring in the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). Ballots are due Monday, March 29, and the results are set to be announced the following day.

The unionization campaign has received the enthusiastic backing of a number of organizations that operate in and around the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus. Among these is the Left Voice website, which is published by supporters of the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS, Socialist Workers Party) in Argentina.

In a statement published on March 21 (“Solidarity Means All Out for Bessemer”), Left Voice calls the unionization effort “a historic opportunity that demands the support of the entire class.” It asserts that this campaign is a “top priority for the Left and for organized labor across the country.” The statement is co-signed by a faction of the Democratic Socialists of America in El Paso, Detroit Will Breathe, Black Power Collective, and a number of other organizations.

The effort to present the RWDSU as a “historic opportunity” for workers runs into a number of contradictions. Most glaring is the support the campaign has received from powerful factions of the ruling class. In particular, the Biden administration and the Democratic Party have aggressively intervened to promote the RWDSU campaign.

The Left Voice statement mentions only in passing the Biden administration’s historically unprecedented intervention to back the union campaign, referring to Biden’s “video statement in which he cynically attempted to paint himself as a friend of working people.” However, it makes no effort to explain why Biden, a right-wing corporate Democrat, is supporting what Left Voice calls a “top priority for the Left.” Biden’s intervention, it asserts, is one of a number of actions “that have had the effect of calling wider attention to the struggle of the workers at Bessemer.”

The layers of the ruling class that Biden speaks for are concerned about the growing militancy of Amazon workers and are seeking to revitalize the corporatist unions to contain and suppress working class opposition.

Support for the union within the ruling class goes beyond the Democratic Party, however. The Left Voice statement does not even mention the endorsement of another prominent political figure, Republican Senator from Florida, Marco Rubio, who published a column in *USA Today* earlier this month stating that he “stands with” the RWDSU unionization drive. He assured “business owners” that bringing in the union at Amazon would not be equivalent to “allowing left-wing social organizers to take over their workplaces.”

Supporters of the PTS in Latin America would certainly be interested to learn that its affiliates in the US are in an alliance with Rubio, a savage enemy of workers in Latin America. In particular, Rubio has been in the forefront of demands for regime change in Cuba and Venezuela and the removal of all restraints on the exploitation of workers in Latin America by US corporations. Perhaps this is why Left Voice has failed to translate many of its articles on the Amazon unionization drive into Spanish for its Latin American readership.

The same counterrevolutionary viciousness that motivates Rubio’s policies in Latin America is behind his support for the unionization campaign in Amazon. Like Biden, Rubio supports bringing in the RWDSU because it will serve as a police force over the working class, not an instrument for working class struggle. Somewhere in the background, moreover, he would have been in discussions with the union on a quid pro quo—securing guarantees in relation to issues of foreign policy in Latin America in exchange for his backing of the union campaign at Amazon.

In earlier statements, Left Voice attempted to provide a “left” cover to its support for the union campaign by asserting that bringing in the RWDSU has to be combined with a “rank-and-file” strategy to oppose the union apparatus.

In a March 20 article, Tatiana Cozzarelli writes, “Even with the drive at Bessemer’s Amazon warehouse opening the floodgates for unionization efforts across the country, we’ve seen all too many unions function as ‘business unions’ in a top-down manner and don’t fight for their workers. That’s why workers need to fight for more than just a union, but for unions run by the rank and file—to make them real fighting tools for the working class.”

In an earlier article, the same author stated, “For the Amazon union to fight the pressure to become a campaign tool for Democrats, Amazon workers will need to take the union in their own hands. They will need to democratically organize the union in the workplace, with rank-and-file assemblies for discussion and decision making.”

In other words, Amazon workers should vote for the union, so that they can bring in a corrupt organization that they will be forced to fight. Cozzarelli does not and cannot explain why workers should not organize themselves to directly fight the company, without an additional force whose sole purpose is to suppress such a struggle and politically subordinate the working class to the Democratic Party.

Bringing in the RWDSU will not create a framework for rank-and-file organization, but an instrument for its suppression. Once a union is officially certified, it brings with it an array of laws designed to undermine the legal foundation of rank-and-file organizations. The

union will claim in contracts that it is the “sole legitimate” representative of the workers, denying workers the actual right to organize in defense of their own interests. In the meantime, they will forfeit their dues money to well-paid bureaucrats who live like management.

Left Voice’s promotion of the union campaign at Bessemer is characteristic of the politics of the PTS, which traces its heritage to a long tradition of Latin American anti-Trotskyism associated with Nahuel Moreno.

Beginning in the mid-20th century, the Morenoite movement oriented to various bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalist movements like Castroism in Cuba. A central element of the politics of Morenoism has been the continual effort to form various opportunist electoral alliances, “fronts” and other organizations to create “space” for themselves as the left flank of bourgeois politics.

In Argentina, Moreno oriented his followers to a political alliance with the movement of General Juan Peron, who had been president of the country between 1946 and 1953 and was a prominent force in Argentine politics even when out of power. Peron was an admirer of Hitler whose program of “justicialism” mirrored fascism in many ways. The Morenoite movement upheld Peron as a hero, even placing his photo on the party’s masthead.

In 1973, when the Argentine ruling class recalled Peron to power in an effort to suppress the explosion of the class struggle that was manifested in the Cordoba general strike of 1969, the Morenoite movement (known then as the PST, Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores) acted as a “left” flank of the Peronist government. The PST’s efforts to subordinate the working class to the bourgeois nationalist government of Peron (and his wife, Isabel, after his death in 1974) served to politically disarm the working class in advance of the 1976 military coup.

More recently, the Morenoites have extolled various “left” bourgeois parties, like the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil, as the path to achieve socialism in Latin America. Today, the PTS—which was formed after the 1987 death of Moreno and the breakup of his Movement toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo-MAS)—is engaged in various unprincipled efforts to create a “united party of the left,” modeled on Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

An indication of the role that Left Voice hopes to play in the US is provided by the actions of the PTS in Argentina. In particular, the PTS is part of the leadership of the teachers union Ademys, which has helped impose the reopening of schools in Argentina amidst the deadly pandemic. Ademys called a 72-hour strike in February ostensibly to oppose reopenings, only to call it off after negotiating certain conditions, including the promise of vaccines, which have not been met.

The Morenoite movement generally justified its adaptation to bourgeois politics in Latin America on the grounds that this was necessary to combat American imperialism. Now, in Alabama, their supporters in the US are supporting a unionization campaign spearheaded by the Democratic Party, among the oldest and most experienced imperialist parties in the world. The AFL-CIO apparatus that they are insisting must be brought into the Bessemer plant has itself played a critical role in supporting all the operations of American imperialism in Latin America.

Two additional points must be made about Left Voice’s campaign for unionization in Alabama.

First, as with the RWDSU campaign as a whole, Left Voice advances no concrete demands that it proposes be associated with the

call for unionization. It does not suggest that bringing in the union should be connected to the demand for the abolition of the hated quota system, protections against the spread of the pandemic, or significant wage increases.

The RWDSU has already stated that it has no program that it is proposing to fight for, a fact that brands it as a top-down operation, not associated with a genuine movement from below. Left Voice is playing its own part in providing cover for this operation.

Second, Left Voice combines its support for the RWDSU with an overtly racist narrative. According to Cozzarelli, “This unionization struggle is a direct product of the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement, alongside the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic, laid bare all the injustices of racist capitalism. Those who mobilized over the summer declared in no uncertain terms that Black people deserve better. Black lives should matter. But they don’t matter to the cops who systematically terrorize and murder Black people. And Black lives don’t matter to Amazon either.”

The effort to present the union campaign in racial terms follows the line of the Democratic Party and Biden himself, who said that a vote for the RWDSU would strengthen “Black and Brown workers.”

On the part of the unions, there are opportunist considerations motivating a racial appeal. The RWDSU hopes that bringing in Black Lives Matter activists would help garner more votes at the Bessemer warehouse, where 85 percent of the workforce is African American. According to one report, appearing on the Payday Report website, “With support weakest among young Black men in the plant many are hoping that the Black Lives Matter movement can get younger Black activists more engaged on their behalf.”

More fundamentally, the racist politics of the Democratic Party, parroted by Left Voice, is aimed at dividing workers and preventing a unified struggle against the capitalist system.

Amazon, in particular, is a massive transnational corporation that employs workers of every race, gender and nationality. The 1.3 million workers at Amazon include nearly 500,000 outside of the United States. In the US, the plurality (32 percent) of Amazon workers are white, while 26.5 percent are African American, 23 percent are Hispanic, and 13.6 percent are Asian. Any campaign against this corporate giant that is based on a racist appeal is branded as reactionary and bankrupt from the start.

The intervention of Left Voice into the unionization campaign at Amazon is directed above all at blocking the already existing and expanding movement of Amazon workers for independent organizations of working class struggle, initiated with the assistance of the Socialist Equality Party and the *International Amazon Workers Voice*. They see this as a dangerous sign of the political radicalization of Amazon workers who are seeking to organize their struggles outside of the control of the pro-capitalist unions and the Democratic Party.



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