

Amazon workers react to the defeat of the RWDSU at Alabama warehouse

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11 April 2021

Last Friday, workers at the Amazon facility in Bessemer, Alabama, resoundingly rejected affiliation with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). Only 738 out of the 5,800 workers at the facility—less than 13 percent—cast a vote in favor of the union, and the final breakdown of the votes of the 3,215 workers who participated showed that the union had been rejected by a more than two-to-one margin.

The result is an ignominious defeat for the union, which had the backing of prominent politicians such as Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders, anticommunist Republican Senator Marco Rubio, and President Joe Biden himself.

Although RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum and sought to blame Amazon's anti-union measures for the defeat, the union failed to convince workers that it could advance their interests in any concrete way. Throughout the organizing campaign, which received extensive media coverage, the RWDSU failed to make a single demand of Amazon. In fact, the union made little effort to talk directly to workers at all.

The *World Socialist Web Site* asked Amazon workers across the country for their reactions to the vote. Whistleblower and former Amazon worker Shannon Allen made the following statement:

Amazon workers will not be saved by the union. It is not a knight in shining armor riding in on a horse. The only thing that's going to change is several more deductions from your paycheck that were not previously there, your voice diminished. A good pay rate and safety are not Amazon's or the union's first priority. Your best interest is not their priority. What is their top priority is blowing smoke up your ass.

They will lie to you. *Amazon workers are not puppets for Bezos. The union will ensure that they are. With a rank-and-file committee, the Amazon workers make the decisions. Why would you want to pay out of your paycheck every week to [have the union] make decisions for you, no input? Look at all the injured and dead employees over the past 25 years that have been swept under the rug. Especially the latest death of an Amazon worker. Her name was Poushawn Brown. She was important to somebody and to her working brothers and sisters. She was loved. She was needed. Amazon doesn't care to investigate her death or give her family and her children answers as to why this healthy 31-year-old went home from work and passed away in her sleep from her shift with a job description of testing employees for coronavirus.*

A worker at Amazon's BWI2 facility in Baltimore felt that the RWDSU's operation had been a "publicity stunt" that was largely promoted by the media. "It was not being motivated from the ground up," he said, adding that the RWDSU failed even to get workers at the facility involved. The RWDSU's unwillingness to raise any concrete demands during the high-profile voting period showed that it wasn't offering any "demonstrable change" for workers, he said.

Speaking of the conditions at Amazon in Baltimore, the worker said that a lot of people have been "beaten down" by the company and are living paycheck-to-paycheck. "There's a history of militancy in this city," he said, but added that working people, especially the youth, had no real political organization that could

connect their struggles to the major class battles of the 20th century. “Working people know they are unhappy, and they know they are oppressed. What they don’t know is who to blame” politically for this situation, he said.

“Me and my coworker were talking about [the Bessemer vote],” said a worker in the San Francisco Bay area. “I knew it wasn’t going to happen.” Referring to unions, he said, “Actually, it’s still a form of them controlling us in a different type of way.”

“The union will not fight for you, they fight for the employer,” a worker commented in an Amazon group on Facebook. Decades of betrayed strikes, including plant closures, wage and benefit cuts and layoffs, substantiate her comment.

The RWDSU and its parent union, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), are a case in point. At many of the poultry plants in Alabama and other southern states, workers “represented” by the RWDSU actually make less than the \$15 paid by Amazon. Even when workers were dying from COVID-19, the RWDSU kept 2,000 poultry workers on the job at a Tyson plant in Camilla, Georgia. The UFCW has done the same despite the infections of over 50,000 meatpacking workers and 250 deaths.

“If you talk with any of the people already represented by RWDSU, then you would know that they are weak and don’t do anything to improve working conditions or increase pay. In fact, this union has made things worse for some folks,” one Amazon worker commented on Facebook. “Not all unions are created equal or do good things for their workers. They did the right thing by voting ‘no.’”

The same worker described the burden that the unions represent for the working class. “It’s useless to settle for a bad union and be stuck paying dues for an organization that isn’t working for you,” she commented on Facebook. “No one should be forced to settle for a union like that. It was a waste of time to even consider it.”

As the WSWS explained in its April 10 perspective, “The RWDSU’s debacle at Amazon,” the “campaign to install the RWDSU at Amazon did not arise from a movement of workers from below. Rather, it was an operation of the AFL-CIO, the ruling class and the state from above. The intervention of the Democratic Party and Biden reflects calculations within substantial

sections of the ruling class that the working class can be better restrained by placing it under de-facto state guardianship within the unions.”

Workers must draw the necessary conclusions from this experience. Workers need new organizations of struggle, independent of the pro-corporate unions, which are democratically controlled by the rank and file, and fight for workers’ needs.

The Socialist Equality Party and *World Socialist Web Site* call for and are assisting workers in forming a network of independent rank-and-file committees in factories, schools and all work locations, which will be critical to the development of a counter-offensive by the working class in the US and internationally against the ruling class and the entire capitalist system.

For help forming a committee at your workplace, contact the *World Socialist Web Site* by filling out the form at wsws.org/workers.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact