

Jacobin magazine: Promoting the unions while ignoring the class struggle

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Since the start of the year, workers throughout the United States have been engaged in a series of significant class struggles that reflect the growth of anger and opposition throughout the country. Workers are fighting back against the ferocious austerity measures of the ruling elite that have followed the massive handout to the corporate and financial elite in the midst of the pandemic.

Sections of nurses, autoworkers, steelworkers, teachers, coal miners and others have been engaged in class battles spanning weeks and months, in which they confront not only the employers and the government, but the treachery of the unions.

Despite the pretense of being a socialist news publication, in *Jacobin* magazine, affiliated with a faction of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), one will search in vain through its pages for even a mention of any the most significant class struggles in the heart of world capitalism.

Some of the most significant struggles of the last six months alone include an ongoing strike by 1,300 steelworkers at Allegheny Technologies (ATI) in Pennsylvania, which has pitted workers against the company and their union, the United Steel Workers (USW). *Jacobin* has not published a single article on the strike.

At Warrior Met Coal in Alabama, 1,100 miners walked out on April 1, determined to restore previous pay cuts and fight abusive and unsafe working conditions. In direct opposition to the efforts of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), workers voted down a sellout contract just over a week later, by a vote of 1,006 to 45, delivering a staggering defeat of the UMWA.

Throughout the 8-week (and counting) struggle of the coal miners, *Jacobin* produced just under 700 words on

the struggle, in one article. Not a single one of those 700 words referred to the betrayal of the UMWA and the massive opposition of workers to it.

Such an exercise could be carried on endlessly: *Jacobin* produced exactly one article on the month-long strike by Columbia graduate workers and one article on the nurses' strike at Saint Vincent Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Perhaps most significant is the battle of Volvo truck workers at the New River Valley Plant in Dublin, Virginia. At every turn, the nearly 3,000 workers at the Volvo plant have been met with opposition from the very organization that claims to represent them, the United Auto Workers.

Workers walked out on strike at the truck manufacturing plant on April 17, determined to win a contract that made up for years of concessions the UAW has handed to the company. Just two weeks into the strike, on April 30, the UAW ordered workers to return to their jobs, claiming it had reached an agreement with "significant gains" for workers. That is, workers were ordered back to work by their union without seeing, let alone voting on the agreement.

Militant workers formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which has issued statements, read by thousands of workers, calling for a "no" vote on the agreement. On May 16, workers overwhelmingly voted down a tentative agreement pushed by the United Auto Workers (UAW), with 91 percent of workers voting against it. The workers recently referred to the UAW-backed contract as "toilet paper."

Not a word has been uttered by *Jacobin* or their co-thinkers in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) on the struggle of the Volvo workers.

This is in sharp contrast to the wealth of coverage and

attention that the magazine gave to the drive to install the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama last month.

Dozens of articles were published by *Jacobin* in the run-up to the vote, hailing it as the most important unionization effort in recent history.

It was, in fact, nothing of the sort. The unionization effort in Bessemer was backed by none other than Democratic President Joe Biden and substantial sections of the political establishment and corporate media. It was a top-down campaign with little to no support from the workers. In the end the RWDSU received only 738 votes in favor, or less than 13 percent of the 5,800 workers at the warehouse.

What *Jacobin* chooses to write about or not write about says as much about the nature of the organization as the content of what it produces.

As with the DSA as a whole, *Jacobin* functions as a faction of the Democratic Party and the corporatist trade unions. They promote the unions—as in the unionization campaign at Bessemer—as an instrument for the suppression of the class struggle. Speaking for privileged layers of the upper middle class, they are deeply hostile to any genuine expression of working-class opposition, which invariably develops in opposition to the union apparatus.

It is for this reason that when they do eventually get around to publishing on workers' struggles, they deliberately cover up the reality of the role played by the unions. When the unions are able to ram through a deal, *Jacobin* inevitably provides press coverage hailing the contract as a win for workers, no matter how meager the gains.

One notable example can be seen in their coverage of the Hunts Point produce workers strike in New York early this year. The Hunts Point workers went on strike for a modest \$1 per hour raise per year.

After the Teamsters Union paraded DSA member and congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on the picket line, the union forced through a sell-out contract in a snap vote, leaving workers 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.

Jacobin proclaimed the Hunts Point strike “a victory

worth celebrating and proof that going on strike works.”

The experience of the past six months is only the beginning of an upsurge of working-class struggle throughout the country and around the world. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* are assisting workers in forming a network of independent rank-and-file committees in factories, schools and all work locations.

Our call for rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporate-controlled trade unions, is part of a broader fight to free the working class from the stranglehold of Democrats and Republicans and rebuild the workers' movement on the basis of an international and revolutionary socialist program.



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