

Co-founder of Amazonians United NYC, DSA member runs for New York City Council

Erik Schreiber
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The top-down drive to “organize” Amazon workers is continuing in the wake of workers’ rejection of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) in Bessemer, Alabama, earlier this year by a two-to-one margin. Democrats such as President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders, and even right-wing Republican Senator Marco Rubio, promoted the RWDSU campaign in the hopes that the unions can serve as a means to block Amazon workers’ efforts to organize independently, and to prevent opposition from developing in a more radical direction.

In the aftermath of the failure of the RWDSU campaign, the Democratic Party, the unions and their satellites are increasingly promoting supposedly “informal,” “worker-led” campaigns at Amazon and elsewhere. This is chiefly because the unions and the Democrats themselves are looked upon with such suspicion by workers that, to boost their chances of winning the allegiance of workers, they are compelled to camouflage their efforts with “grassroots” fronts and radical posturing.

This is the context for the emergence and promotion of a group calling itself “Amazonians United.” Although the group presents itself at times as critical of the major trade unions, some of its leaders, such as Christian Zamarrón of Amazonians United Chicagoland, emerged directly out of training under the union apparatus, the Democratic Party and the state.

A close review of Zamarrón’s background revealed that he gathered information about workers’ struggles while interning for the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Center office in Mexico. The Solidarity Center works closely with the US State Department, receives significant funding from the US government, and has for decades helped to subvert workers’ struggles internationally. As a former field organizer for the failed mayoral campaign of Jesús “Chuy” Garcia (who is now a United States Representative for Illinois), Zamarrón also has ties to the Democratic Party itself.

Upon further scrutiny, other branches of the organization, such as Amazonians United New York City (NYC), are no different, being staffed by seasoned operatives from within and around the Democratic Party. One of the co-founders of Amazonians United NYC is Jonathan Bailey, who is now running in the Democratic Party primaries for the New York City Council elections.

An examination of Bailey’s background exposes the thoroughly top-down, establishment character of the formations being promoted by the Democratic Party and the unions.

From the reactionary Rosasco to the “socialist” Ocasio-Cortez

Bailey’s political career appears to have begun in 2009, when he managed David Rosasco’s campaign for New York City Council. Rosasco, the owner of a translation company who had been chair of the Woodside Neighborhood Association, sought to be included on the ballot

in the Democratic primary. His reactionary platform included proposals to reintroduce “morals classes” into public schools, increase the police presence, and crack down on prostitution. Rosasco also opposed gay marriage, appealing to backwardness, bigotry, and prejudice. After his unsuccessful run, Rosasco left the Democratic Party for the Republican Party.

The candidate who ultimately won the Democratic primary and the council seat was Jimmy Van Bramer, who ran as a “progressive.” Bailey would later start a public spat with Van Bramer.

Along the way, and notwithstanding his past association with Rosasco’s reactionary campaign, Bailey became a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Despite its name, this organization has nothing to do with socialism, as it is dedicated to channeling left-wing opposition into the dead end of the capitalist Democratic Party, of which it is a faction. Leading members of the DSA recently conducted a coordinated campaign that celebrated the assassination of Leon Trotsky and revived the Stalinist lies used to justify the mass murder of socialists in the Soviet Union.

When Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ran for the US House of Representatives in 2018, Bailey, who had become membership coordinator of the Queens branch of the DSA, joined her campaign and led its data-entry team. Ocasio-Cortez, who had been an aspiring entrepreneur, had no record of participation in social struggles when the Democrats chose her as a candidate. Only after this point did she become a member of the DSA, which gave her the left-wing veneer that contributed to her subsequent victory.

In the first months of Ocasio-Cortez’s first term, Bailey told the *Nation* that her efforts in Congress were essential to “building power” and achieving needed change. But while Ocasio-Cortez occasionally criticized the Democratic leadership in public, she consistently defended the party despite its anti-immigrant and imperialist policies. She has dropped her demand to abolish US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, praised the late warmongering Republican Senator John McCain and donated funds to support the political campaigns of right-wing congressional Democrats with backgrounds in the military and the Central Intelligence Agency.

More recently, Ocasio-Cortez has stepped into the role of an unabashed propagandist for the Democrats, whom she claims have undergone “almost a radical change.” She has denounced a socialist orientation to the working class as “class essentialism” and tarred people who criticize Biden from the left as “bad faith actors.”

Radical posturing and maneuvers within and around the Democratic Party

After working for the successful Ocasio-Cortez campaign, Bailey was

appointed co-chair of Queens DSA. In May 2019, New York City Councilman Van Bramer announced his candidacy for Queens borough president. Van Bramer had defeated Rosasco, the candidate for whom Bailey had campaigned, for the Democratic nomination to the City Council 10 years earlier. Van Bramer emailed Bailey to arrange a meeting with him.

Bailey responded with a blog post full of left-sounding bombast, including the assertion that his conflict with Van Bramer was part of a “war in AOC’s district between socialist and democrats [sic].” Bailey wrote, “I have been trying to stay off your radar because I was afraid that if you realized that I was the new Co-Chair of Queens DSA, it might make it clear how unenthusiastic we are about the idea of endorsing you.”

Though Bailey appeared to be speaking on behalf of Queens DSA, other members distanced themselves from his letter, indicating they had not been consulted before it was published. More recently, Bailey resigned as co-chair of Queens DSA to run for New York City Council, asserting with unintended irony that his resignation was necessary to “preserve the movement’s class independence” during his run. Bailey is hoping to replace Van Bramer, who is now running for Queens borough president, as the representative of District 26.

Run for City Council

Bailey faces a crowded field and, as of June 4, had raised less money than any other candidate. In a campaign video, Bailey presents himself as a crusader for workers, touting his co-founding of Amazonians United and taking credit for Amazon’s cancellation of its decision to build part of its new headquarters in Long Island City.

Bailey was working as a sortation associate at Amazon’s Queens facility when the first COVID-19 infection by an employee of the company was reported there in March 2020. According to media reports, Bailey was involved in organizing walkouts on March 18 and March 20 to protest the company’s handling of the infection. After the second walkout, a regional manager called Bailey into his office and interrogated him at length about the action, and Bailey was later written up by management for “harassment.” The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) subsequently found that Amazon had broken the law by interrogating and threatening Bailey.

Bailey and Amazonians United NYC also sought to boost their credibility with workers by authoring a petition addressed to significant workplace issues in Amazon warehouses, calling for protections from the coronavirus, paid sick leave, and an end to Amazon’s shipment of all nonessential items.

Bailey, and Amazonians United more generally, have received generally favorable coverage from the corporate press. To cite one example, the business magazine *Fortune* published an article in April that spoke positively about the expansion of Amazonians United from Chicago to other cities such as New York and Sacramento. “We’re seeing ourselves as the agents of change,” the article quoted Bailey as saying. “If anyone’s going to do anything, it’s going to be us that changes our conditions.”

The fact that the establishment media is covering and promoting Bailey’s activism, while it blacks out struggles such as the ongoing strike of Volvo workers, is a sure sign that the efforts of this long-time Democratic Party operative are perceived as acceptable if not tolerable for the corporate oligarchy.

Indeed, Bailey’s platform, as outlined on his campaign website, does not include any proposals to improve the pay, benefits or working conditions of Amazon workers (or any other workers) in a substantial and

meaningful way. He instead offers the tired old reformist formulas typical of Democratic Party candidates, such as paid family leave and protections against unfair termination. The Democratic Party has repeatedly promised these reforms and failed to deliver them when elected, and meanwhile the corporations flagrantly trample on the legal frameworks already in place.

Significantly, Bailey also proposes the creation of a legal category called “dependent contractors” for gig workers such as Uber and Lyft drivers. Such proposals for a “third” category nominally between full-time employee and independent contractor have been gaining growing support among the Democratic Party establishment and the unions. While the proposals vary in the formal details, the essential aim behind them is to create a legal framework to facilitate the expansion of the unions among gig workers, while at the same time leaving these workers bereft of most or all rights afforded to full-time employees.

Bailey’s platform does not challenge in the slightest the domination of society by the banks and corporations. He does not even call for Amazon, against which he purports to be leading workers in struggle, to pay more in taxes, much less to be nationalized, expropriated or placed under workers’ control. Also significant is the lack of any reference to the pandemic, the abandonment of measures to combat it and the reopening of unsafe schools and workplaces in New York.

The Way Forward for Amazon Workers

To understand the nature of an organization, one must examine where it came from. The fact that Bailey is a co-founder of Amazonians United speaks volumes about its essential character. Throughout his political career, Bailey has supported politicians such as Ocasio-Cortez and Rosasco, who uphold capitalist politics, capitalist exploitation and the interests of US imperialism.

As the histories of Bailey and Zamarrón show, Amazonians United is led and controlled by seasoned operatives of the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO. It is yet another trap set up to use radical slogans and even talk of “socialism” to capture the emerging struggles of Amazon workers within a trade union framework and Democratic Party politics, which means in the final analysis the defense of capitalist property and the “right” of capitalists to exploit workers for profit.

This orientation is incompatible with any struggle for the objective needs of the working class. Amazon workers face constant surveillance, relentless pressure to “make rate,” extraordinary rates of injury, and poverty wages. Walkouts in New York and strikes in Germany and Italy show that Amazon workers are looking for ways to fight for safer conditions and better pay.

But the model for this response is not Amazonians United, a front that has been set up by the Democratic Party and the unions and is being promoted in the corporate media. Instead, Amazon workers should model their organization on the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which is organizing workers in Virginia independently of the corrupt United Auto Workers (UAW) union and of the capitalist political parties, as well as the rank-and-file committee already formed by Baltimore workers at Amazon’s BWI2 warehouse.

The VWRFC has led workers in their rejection of two consecutive sellout contracts and has resumed a strike in the face of opposition from Volvo and the UAW.

Furthermore, Amazon’s global reach underscores the need for an international response on the part of the entire working class. The *World Socialist Web Site* has issued a call for an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to coordinate the struggles of the working class internationally, and to combat the nationalism that the

unions and capitalist states use to divide workers. We urge Amazon workers to sign up today to learn more about joining or forming a rank-and-file committee.



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