New York Times hails “labor coverage” of publications aligned with the Democratic Party and trade union apparatus

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On Sunday, the *New York Times* published an article by media reporter Ben Smith lauding what he called a resurgence of reporting on labor issues amid the recent strike wave. The article is titled “Why we all care about national labor coverage now.”

The simple answer to Smith’s headline is that the corporate media only cares now because tens of thousands of workers have gone on strike, threatening the profits of the corporations and damaging the portfolios of affluent shareholders. The political establishment is nervous that these strikes have broken out in defiance of the trade unions, and the *Times* is trying to promote publications that can shore up support for these pro-management institutions.

Smith writes, “At a moment of political turmoil, economic change and a pandemic-driven focus on how we work, labor has become a hot news beat.” He praises the “new energy of the niche publications Labor Notes, Strikewave and Payday Report” as well as *Teen Vogue* columnist Kim Kelly and More Perfect Union, an organization he calls “the most ambitious new entrant on the scene.”

The *Times* is deeply concerned over the hostility among workers to the unions. The article links to a November 1 *Times* piece by Noam Scheiber warning that the present strike wave shows that “workers have even grown skeptical of their union leadership” and that “Deere workers cited discontent with their union’s leadership in explaining their vote against the initial contract the union had negotiated.”

The purpose of Smith’s article is to present a series of pro-Democratic Party publications, funded by the corporate enemies of the working class, as legitimate defenders of the interests of working people. It is an exercise in the absurd.

Smith does have experience in the class struggle—from the side of the corporations against the working class. As editor-in-chief of *Buzzfeed* in 2019, he led the publication’s opposition to efforts by journalists to establish a NewsGuild chapter. In a 2020 article, Smith acknowledged he was “on the management side of an organizing drive” because, he argued, “profits are scarce.”

The organizations he promotes have no closer relationship to the working class than he does. Smith writes that More Perfect Union, “is led, in part, by Faiz Shakir, the former manager of Bernie Sanders 2020 presidential campaign, and Nico Pitney, a former top editor at The Huffington Post and NowThis News.”

Shakir is a high-level operative of the Democratic Party. According to a Georgetown University alumni profile, he “worked as one of the most senior advisors to former Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid” where he “directed policy and communications work for Senator Reid while also coordinating with Democratic members and staffs, key interest groups, and press to organize issue campaigns. Prior to that, Shakir served as Senior Adviser and Director of Digital Media for House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi.”

Before working for the pro-Democratic Party Huffington Post, More Perfect Union’s co-founder, Nico Pitney, worked for the Center for American Progress, a Democratic Party think tank founded by former Clinton White House Chief of Staff and Obama adviser John Podesta. Pitney’s wife was also a Pelosi staffer for 12 years and served as a senior adviser to the House speaker from 2010 to 2012.

Smith also reports that More Perfect Union has

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"backing from George Soros's Open Society Foundation."

The Open Society Foundation is a corporate-backed official partner of the National Democratic Institute, a Democratic Party-linked organization founded through the CIA-backed National Endowment for Democracy. The NDI is funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State, and it is a tool for carrying out the interests of American imperialism on a world scale.

The other organizations referenced by Smith are closely associated with the same trade union bureaucracy against which workers are rebelling.

Strikewave is a minor publication run by a number of trade union bureaucrats. Its secretary-treasurer, Sean Collins, is a staff member of SEIU Local 200 whose 2019 salary was $78,637. Another board member, Bryan Conlon, is National Organizer for the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), and his 2019 salary was $81,194. To give a flavor for Strikewave's coverage, its obituary of former AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka refers to him as "a firebrand" and "giant of the movement" who led "bruising strikes."

Labor Notes is a longstanding defender of the AFL-CIO. Its public face, Jonah Furman, was a Democratic Party staffer on multiple campaigns.

Kim Kelly of *Teen Vogue* is also a supporter of the Democratic Party. In January 2021 she praised "Democrats like Barack Obama" for taking "a more worker-first approach" as president compared with Republicans, and she used her column to promote the Democratic Party in the 2018 midterm elections.

Pay Day Report was founded by Mike Elk, a former union bureaucrat and staffer for Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign. Referring to the newly anointed AFL-CIO President, he said, "I like Liz Shuler a lot on a personal level," and he has also praised Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren as a defender of workers.

Of course, the *Times* can make no reference to the *World Socialist Web Site*, though by any objective standard its "labor coverage" is far more significant. The WSWS has a readership among workers that is an order of magnitude more than the publications mentioned above. The WSWS is ranked the 10,683rd most read website in the US, according to Alexa.com's rankings, while Labor Notes is ranked 195,000, Strikewave 2,000,000, Pay Day Report 2,300,000, and More Perfect Union 2,348,000.

There is no publication that has come close to the WSWS's coverage of the strike wave. Since the John Deere contract expired in August, the WSWS has published 54 articles on the subject. Internal readership figures establish that the WSWS has been read by virtually the entire 10,000-person Deere workforce in the US. By comparison, Labor Notes has published only five articles on John Deere, Pay Day Report has published one and Strikewave has published zero.

The *New York Times*' endorsement of Pay Day Report, Labor Notes, Strikewave, More Perfect Union and Kim Kelly is not directed to workers, who do not read the *Times.* Rather, Smith's article is intended to tip off wealthy donors and political insiders as to which publications can be trusted to get the strike movement under control.

Smith's article is part of an effort by the Democratic Party, the trade union bureaucracies, and corporations like the *New York Times* to maintain control of the class struggle so that strikes can be suffocated and sold out by the AFL-CIO as they have been for the last 40 years.

The other central aspect of this is censorship. Twitter, Facebook and Google will continue to try to throttle readership of the *World Socialist Web Site* by manipulating its algorithms. On this basis, the richest 10 percent (which comprises the bulk of the *Times*' audience) can continue accumulating massive levels of wealth as working people are forced back to work in the midst of the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

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