

National Labor Relations Board schedules new election at Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama

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The National Labor Relations Board has announced a new election at the Amazon fulfillment center in Bessemer, Alabama which is set to begin this week. Ballots will be mailed in from the facility's 6,000 workers starting on February 4 until March 25, when the final vote will be tabulated by the NLRB.

The BHM1 warehouse was the site of a vote last year on whether to recognize the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) as the official bargaining agent of the workforce, in which workers resoundingly rejected the union. The NLRB overturned the result after it determined that Amazon's decision to place a ballot mailbox on its property and other efforts to intimidate workers "destroyed the laboratory conditions and justifies a second election."

There is no doubt that Amazon workers want to fight against one of the most exploitative employers in the United States. A May 2021 report published by the trade union-aligned Strategic Organizing Center discovered Amazon injury rates to be two times higher than the rest of the warehousing industry. The British *Guardian* cites a "climate of fear" at Amazon, leading to "high rates of injuries."

Since last year's election, numerous workers have died at the BHM1 facility. The multimedia website *Mashable* reported in December that "[t]wo Amazon workers from [the] Bessemer, Alabama facility died last month, one of them suffering a stroke not long after his request to go home was denied." The RWDSU was celebrating the NLRB's reelection ruling "the same day one of the Bessemer warehouse workers allegedly died."

Last week, *Engadget* reported that the BHM1 management had retaliated against a 20-year-old

worker who it claimed was "soliciting in working areas, during working associate times" in support of the RWDSU. The company sought to intimidate the worker by moving him to a part of the warehouse where he could be "more easily observed."

While Amazon would prefer not to interact with a trade union in its relations with employees, the RWDSU is a trusted pro-corporate organization which, if given an opportunity, will work to enforce the dictates of management as it has in other industries, to the detriment of its own members.

It is far from certain whether the RWDSU will win in the reelection. According to *Bloomberg* and other publications, the turnover at BHM1 and other Amazon facilities is so massive that over half of the previous workforce has quit or been fired by the company. "Nearly half of the 6,143 Amazon.com Inc. warehouse workers eligible to vote in a union re-do election in the coming weeks in Bessemer, Alabama, are new and didn't vote in a drive that failed last year," writes the publication.

Throughout the course of the pandemic, teachers, autoworkers, food workers and others have been forced to mount their struggles in opposition not only against their companies, but against the collusion and treachery of their so-called "bargaining representatives."

In education, the American Federation of Teachers has collaborated with the Democratic and Republican Parties to enforce an unsafe return to work that has led to thousands of children and teachers dying of COVID-19. In the auto industry, workers have battled against the collusion of the UAW with management to enforce sellout agreements in order to shut down or prevent strikes.

Tyson Foods workers in Camilla, Georgia, who are members that were organized by the RWDSU, were forced to stay at work in order to make their bosses profits even as their coworkers died from COVID-19.

This has allowed corporate profits to surge despite an unprecedented number of strikes in various industries. The *Wall Street Journal* last month cited figures from the United States Department of Labor, stating “[s]o far, nonunion workers have seen their wages rise faster than union workers.” The *Journal* notes that “nonunion wages for private-sector workers rose 4.7% from the same quarter a year ago, compared with 3.5% for union wages.” This has allowed corporate profits to surge while real wages have lagged behind inflation.

The RWDSU’s campaign has relied on unprecedented support from the Democratic Party and capitalist press, and even some figures from the Republican Party, to sell itself to workers. “Unionization efforts involving some of the most recognizable names in business have dominated headlines across the United States in recent months,” cheers the *New York Times* in an article last week promoting the RWDSU. The *Times* makes note of the “increased awareness of union activity thanks to media coverage of prominent organizing efforts.”

The aim of the Biden administration’s campaign to bolster the pro-corporate trade unions is to enlist the services of the union bureaucracy in enforcing labor discipline on the workforce. While proclaiming himself to be the most pro-labor president in American history, Biden has responded with guilty silence to countless sellouts forced through by the unions over the past year.

A recent court injunction against a threatened strike by 17,000 BNSF railway workers last week shows the type of state-dominated “labor movement” that the Biden administration is seeking to build up. In his ruling, the federal judge declared that the injunction would serve “the public interest” because “a strike would exacerbate our current supply-chain crisis.” Resolving this crisis by working freight and industrial workers as hard as possible has been a key objective of the administration, which also brokered a deal last year to keep Southern California ports operating 24 hours a day. Later, Biden even threatened to deploy the National Guard to ease bottlenecks on West Coast ports. At issue is not only maintaining record profits

during the pandemic for US corporations, but of preparing for major new wars abroad by enforcing “labor peace” at home. In April last year, Biden announced the formation of a task force to encourage unionization chaired by Vice President Kamala Harris, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Defense Secretary General Lloyd Austin. White House labor adviser Seth Harris said at the time, “The simple fact of the matter is having a unionized work force means... you’ll have more skilled, more experienced workers working on government procurement. You don’t have the same labor strife.”

Amazon workers need organizations in order to fight back against multinational behemoths such as Amazon, but they will not find them in the existing, pro-capitalist unions. Instead, workers must form new, independent organizations, democratically controlled by workers, which base themselves on what workers need and not what management and the government are prepared to dispense with.

Amazon workers in Baltimore, Maryland have already taken an important first step by forming such an organization, a rank-and-file committee, at the BWI2 warehouse. This is part of a growing international network of committees, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which are fighting to mobilize workers independently of both management, the capitalist parties and the pro-corporate unions.



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