

RWDSU likely headed for defeat as turnout declines in second vote at Amazon plant in Bessemer, Alabama

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The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) appears headed for defeat in a second vote ordered by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) at the BHM1 facility in Bessemer, Alabama.

Voting has concluded, with 993 workers voting “no” and 875 in favor of joining. More than 400 votes have been challenged, however, more than enough to impact the result of the election. The contested ballots will be settled by the NLRB over the next several weeks.

According to Reuters, the turnout at the election actually decreased from last year, with only about 39 percent of the 6,143 employees depositing a ballot, compared to 50 percent in 2021, when the RWDSU lost. In the earlier election, the RWDSU only secured 738 “yes” votes, or less than 13 percent of the workforce.

Whatever the final outcome, the vote makes clear that, despite a year-long campaign and the backing of the Biden administration, the RWDSU was incapable of significantly increasing its vote among Amazon workers.

The vote at the Bessemer plant (BHM1) coincides with a vote at the JFK8 Amazon warehouse in Staten Island, New York, where the Amazon Labor Union is attempting to win the votes of nearly 6,000 workers. In that vote, which concluded Wednesday, the ALU is leading with 1,518 votes in favor, to 1,154 opposed.

The vote at Bessemer last year was overturned by the NLRB after it declared that Amazon interfered with the voting process. In addition to being given a second shot at campaigning at BHM1, the NLRB ruled late last year that RWDSU supporters could conduct work inside Amazon facilities.

In other words, after the smashing defeat for the RWDSU, the Biden administration took measures to

essentially install it at the Amazon facility. Biden is doing this because he sees the unions as a means of policing the workers and preventing the eruption of mass struggles by nearly 1 million Amazon workers, who play a critical role in the US supply chain.

Before the election concluded, Yahoo! Finance wrote that a “different strategy and a new set of grievances have energized the campaign” at Bessemer, with “up to 150 organizers on the ground in Bessemer at any given time.” This campaign “favors person-to-person conversations with workers” rather than “attracting big-name supporters like President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT).”

Whatever the tactical changes, the RWDSU campaign was and is driven entirely from the top, with support from the corporatist union apparatus and the state, but with no broad base among workers themselves. A pro-RWDSU rally held in late February attracted “[o]nly a handful of employees from the facility,” with the majority of participants being “members of other local unions,” Business Insider noted.

As with the previous failed election, the RWDSU raised no demands in relation to its campaign. Instead, it has banked on the vague illusions workers might have in it to improve conditions.

There is enormous opposition among Amazon workers against the horrific conditions of exploitation at the facility and throughout the company. Mashable reported last December that two workers at BHM1 died “within hours of each other,” one “suffering a stroke not long after his request to go home was denied.” A gas leak at BHM1 last Friday, the day before voting closed, resulted in vaporized oil “spreading through the

air vents,” wrote AL.com.

A 911 call log obtained by Yahoo! Finance revealed a rate of one 911 emergency call placed from BHM1 every two days in 2022. The reasons given for the emergency calls “included heart attacks, psychiatric problems, and fainting.” Workers at the company are “twice as likely to get hurt as workers in non-Amazon warehouses,” states the Business Insider.

The horrendous safety record at Amazon has *been* fully exposed by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Amazon has sought to hide its total infection numbers at its fulfillment centers throughout the United States. Instead, it routinely sends its employees nondescript text messages, informing them that an “individual” or “individuals” have been infected at a facility. It does this even as it abandons masking and other safety precautions.

While Stuart Appelbaum, RWDSU president, denounced Amazon last week for “[keeping] workers at their stations when there is a known health and safety issue,” his organization and other unions supporting the BHM1 campaign have allowed corporations to sacrifice workers’ health during the pandemic.

For its part, the ALU in Staten Island claims to be an “independent” union staffed by Amazon workers. However, the organization has received support from the Democratic Party, one of the main capitalist parties of big business. It has stated that both the RWDSU and it “have the same common goals.”

The Biden administration, speaking for a faction of the ruling class, has aggressively promoted the pro-corporate trade unions because they are seen as critical instruments for the class struggle. During the pandemic, the unions have played the treacherous role of enforcing the ruling class’s back-to-work campaign, which has led to the deaths of more than 1 million people.

Now, under conditions of soaring inflation and the US-NATO war drive in Eastern Europe against Russia, the trade unions are seen as even more crucial in “disciplining” the working class at home.

Regardless of the final outcome of the votes in Alabama and New York, Amazon workers will confront the challenge of building an independent organization, democratically controlled by the rank and file, to fight for their class interests and link their struggles with the growing movement of workers

throughout the United States and internationally.

We encourage Amazon workers to get in contact with us now to begin this necessary struggle to build genuine independent rank-and-file organizations to defend their interests.



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