

Amazon fires managers for not being sufficiently aggressive against union organizing efforts at JFK8

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In a move that combines vindictiveness and cold, strategic calculation, Amazon recently fired more than a half-dozen senior managers at its JFK8 facility on Staten Island, New York. This action follows the win by the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) of a representation election at this same warehouse, the first at any Amazon facility in the US.

Amazon responded to the ALU campaign with a massive effort of its own, including the hiring of highly paid consultants to counter the ALU's efforts. Amazon is contesting the result of the JFK8 election, alleging that the union used coercive tactics to gain workers' support and the actions by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) tipped the election in favor of the ALU. The firings also come less than a week after the loss by the ALU of a representation election at another Amazon facility, LDJ5, in the same Staten Island complex. To date, no firings of managers at the latter location have been announced.

A number of the fired managers as well as others at the JFK8 facility have anonymously told the press that Amazon's action was a response to the vote in favor of the ALU. This is supported by the fact that the timing of these firings did not coincide with the company's normal review cycle and that most of the fired managers, some with years of experience, were directly involved in Amazon's effort to counter unionization. An Amazon spokesperson stated that the firings were made after an evaluation of "operations and leadership."

It is clear that Amazon concluded that these managers were insufficiently aggressive against the unionization effort and wants to send a message to other managers that they had better be even more forceful against

attempts to unionize the workforce if they want to keep their jobs. This is despite the extensive use by the company of clearly coercive tactics such as the "mandatory meetings" at which workers were forced to listen to company representatives harangue them about a myriad of alleged negative consequences that would follow unionization, up to and including dismissal.

These were so egregious, despite the fact that similar tactics have been utilized for decades by other corporations, that the NLRB has issued a preliminary finding that there is merit in a complaint by the ALU against this practice. The result, however, is likely to be no more than a slap on the wrist to Amazon.

On the same day as the firings were announced, Christian Smalls testified before Congress that Amazon had violated labor laws in its campaign against the union. Later, he, along with other union leaders, visited the White House and met with President Biden, who has proclaimed himself to be the most pro-union president in history. The true relationship between the government and large corporations, such as Amazon, was clearly illustrated in the recent re-award of a \$10 billion federal contract to Amazon by the Biden administration. This runs contrary to Biden's earlier pledge not to award federal contracts to companies that engage in anti-union campaigns.

Smalls' invitation to the White House underscores how important the Biden administration considers the unions in its plans to suppress working-class opposition to rising inflation and demands that it bear the cost of the economic crisis and escalating military confrontation with Russia.

As for the ALU itself, it has no perspective other than appealing to the capitalist state for support, along with

the major unions, including the Teamsters. This will only lead those workers who voted for the ALU into a complete dead end. Every effort that rank-and-file Amazon workers make to win improved wages and working conditions, oppose arbitrary terminations and protect their democratic rights will directly clash with the ALU as its tries to please its new-found friends in the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

In a related action, it has just been announced that Amazon has fired two more employees involved in union organizing at the Staten Island complex. It should be remembered that the initial impetus for the formation of the ALU came when Smalls and coworkers were fired for organizing a protest against unsafe conditions early during the pandemic.

Amazon is sending a clear message, not only to its management staff but to all its employees, that it will utilize all available means to cow its workforce into submission. This occurs in tandem with the company's recent elimination of any remaining mask mandates and pandemic sick leave, which illustrate its utter disregard for worker health and safety.

The company is notorious for incessant speedup and intensive surveillance of its workforce. The constant, draconian pressure imposed on the workers for maximum productivity has created an environment of insecurity under which individuals constantly fear being targeted for dismissal. Among Amazon's tactics, targeted workers are moved to especially difficult job assignments and when they fall short of unrealistic quotas in even the most trivial way are then let go for poor performance. The result is a workforce turnover rate of 150 percent per year, the highest in the industry, along with the highest injury rate in the industry.

This barbaric regime is clearly intended to maintain a constant flux in the workforce in order to minimize the opportunity to develop solidarity among workers. Amazon wants the workforce to remain fragmented, making collective organization and action more difficult.

But Amazon workers are in a powerful position to fight back. The more than 1.1 million Amazon workers in the US play a central role in the global supply chain. They are connected to broad sections of the working class, from manufacturing workers in Asia, maritime workers on the ships crossing the ocean and dockworkers on the West Coast ports, to the truckers,

railway workers and UPS, FedEx and US Post Office delivery drivers who move the goods to and from the Amazon warehouses to the customers' doors. A movement by any section of Amazon workers to halt production would have an immediate impact on far-broader sections of the US and world economy.

It will not take long for Amazon workers to make their experience with the ALU. To utilize their power, Amazon workers need real organizations of struggle, which are completely independent of the big business politicians and pro-capitalist unions. This means the building of Amazon Workers Rank-and-File Committees in every warehouse and facility.



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