

Amazon Labor Union withdraws plans to hold election in the California Inland Empire

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On October 21, the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) withdrew its petition to hold a unionization vote at the ONT8 Amazon fulfillment center located in Moreno Valley, California. No official statement has come out as to why the ALU has withdrawn their petition and plans to resubmit an election petition is already underway.

The petition to file for a vote was set on October 12 and the National Labor Relations Board confirmed that there was sufficient interest in holding a unionization vote based off of the 800 signatures that the ALU provided.

The retraction came just three days after Amazon workers at the ALB1 facility in Albany, New York voted decisively against unionizing with the ALU. That vote followed another rejected unionization attempt at the LDJ5 facility in Staten Island, New York in May of this year. Tallies from both the ALB1 and LDJ5 votes have all turned out against union ratification with sizeable majorities at each facility showing no interest in voting.

Despite the significant margins of defeat, workers continue to petition to unionize at the notoriously exploitative logistics giant and stage regular protests at facilities throughout the world. The 800 signatures collected at the ONT8 facility in Moreno Valley, California, for instance, represent a third of the workforce employed there.

Amazon workers are incensed over pay raises that do not keep pace with inflation and the complete disregard for safety considerations concerning COVID and severe weather. Heat waves this year have led to untold misery as workers collapsed on the job and other events have killed and hospitalized workers in recent months. Workers at the nearby Amazon KSBD air hub in the Inland Empire have staged frequent walkouts over

demands for improved pay and breaks to cope with the heat.

Other issues facing Amazon workers are the harsh punitive policies, with even the smallest of infractions leading to a worker's termination.

Nannette Plascencia, an ONT8 Amazon worker and lead organizer for United4Change, an affiliate of the ALU which assisted with the ALU's petition, explains Amazon's Time Off Task (TOT) system which tracks workers for every minute of their shift.

"You could be at 100% of your rate and still get disciplined for TOT," Plascencia testified. "TOT never stops. If you go to the bathroom, or you stop to pick something up that fell on the floor, or the line jams — which is out of your control — it's all going to show as TOT. With TOT you don't get a warning, you don't get written up, you can go straight to a firing."

Workers have also reported that they are penalized for an hour of their Unpaid Time Off (UPT) even if they are a minute late from break, which would be illegal under current labor laws.

Other issues include working with outdated equipment which is prone to breaking down, causing dangerous workplace hazards. This month a trash compactor caught on fire at JFK8 in Staten Island, New York, provoking a mass protest among the workforce.

The ONT8 facility resides within the Inland Empire, which encompasses San Bernardino and Riverside Counties in Southern California just east of Los Angeles. This area is a critical logistics hub for Amazon, giving it access to major highways and rail lines, along with their close proximity to the two largest shipping ports in the US, Los Angeles and Long Beach. More than 32.5 percent of all cargo containers move through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, eventually flowing through the Inland Empire and the

rest of the country.

Riverside and San Bernardino counties combined make nearly 220,000 truck trips a day and account for more than half of the 1,310 miles of roadways in Southern California. They have been designated as part of the national Primary Freight Network.

This positioning makes Amazon workers a particularly powerful workforce, residing over a crucial choke point in the national economy. Objectively, their struggle is linked with truck, port and rail workers who all play an important role in the supply chain.

Currently, workers in both the West Coast ports and the rail industry are being forced to labor with expired contracts. In both the ports and rail, the United States federal government has directly intervened under the authority of Democratic President Joe Biden to block any concerted strike action, imposing the demands of the corporations on the workers.

The ALU's strategy has been to look to these same institutions, the capitalist state and the Democratic Party, to gain leverage against the trillion dollar corporation. Workers throughout the logistics industry and the transport sector face similar difficulties and have an objective class interest in uniting their struggles as one.

In this fight, Amazon workers should look for inspiration to the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed to countermand and oppose the efforts of the rail operators, government and the union leadership to break their resistance and force through another sellout contract. Workers have held informational pickets across the country, calling on their fellow workers to take matters into their own hands and fight the pro-corporate conspiracy against them.

Amazon workers must take similar steps in order to unite their struggles among themselves and their fellow industrial brothers and sisters.



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