

Teamsters president holds UPS rally in New York with head of UAW, strikebreaking Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez

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Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien attended a rally in New York City on Saturday, held with two weeks left to go before the current contract expires for 340,000 UPS workers. The rally was also attended by United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain, as well as US Congresswoman and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The rally was a further demonstration of the fact that the bureaucracies in all the trade unions are closely coordinating with the capitalist political establishment in a bid to rein in the growing strike wave and enforce sellout contracts.

Ocasio-Cortez became notorious last December for her vote to ban a strike by 120,000 railroaders and enforce a contract they had rejected. She was joined by two other members of the DSA in Congress, and a key role in the bill's swift passage in the Senate was played by Bernie Sanders. Their votes exposed these fake "socialists" as pro-capitalist politicians who use left-sounding phrases to cover for the Democratic Party.

As for UAW President Fain, he, like O'Brien, is a high-ranking career bureaucrat and key figure in numerous sellout contracts who has been recast as a "reformer" with the help of the DSA and pseudo-left factions within the union. Fain has also deployed bombastic "militant" rhetoric in an effort to head off an explosion of opposition among the 150,000 workers at the US automakers whose contracts expire in mid-September.

A similar rally is planned in Los Angeles on Wednesday, where O'Brien will appear alongside representatives of the Writers Guild of America. The Teamsters' Entertainment Division has pledged it would not allow its members to cross writers' picket lines, but in reality it has utilized enormous loopholes to keep at least some workers on the job during the writers' strike, and it has prohibited its members from joining WGA picket lines.

The Teamsters officialdom, faced with widespread anger and distrust from the rank and file, has been compelled to promise a strike at UPS by August 1 if a deal has not been struck by the deadline. They have been maneuvering constantly to get a deal done before then, but have so far been unable to finish an agreement with UPS, which is demanding historic cuts, and no

official talks have taken place since July 5.

On the Sunday following the New York rally, O'Brien chaired a "contract update" webinar where, in response to a hand-picked question from the floor, he admitted that the Teamsters would keep workers on the job past the August 1 deadline if the union has reached a tentative agreement before then. This delay, which he said could last as much as three and a half weeks, would supposedly be to allow time for a ratification vote of the membership. In other words, O'Brien and the Teamsters are setting the conditions to violate their continuously repeated pledge with a last-minute deal and lengthy delay, in a manner similar to what took place on the railroads shortly before a strike deadline last September.

However, the Teamsters bureaucracy's efforts to prevent a strike has been dealt a blow by the strike by tens of thousands of actors in SAG-AFTRA. The simultaneous strikes by actors and screenwriters, in spite of attempts by the union apparatus to prevent this, objectively strengthens the position of UPS workers and workers everywhere. Picketers in the TV and film industry are widely hopeful that they will be joined shortly by their brothers and sisters at UPS and in other industries.

But the most significant challenge to the Teamsters bureaucracy is the growth of organized opposition among UPS workers themselves. Two weeks ago, workers from around the country met and voted to establish the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Its aim, according to its founding statement, is "to organize ourselves—not to 'support' the bargaining committee and to cheerlead for them, but to enforce our democratic will, and position ourselves to countermand the inevitable sellout." Similar committees have been established in the auto industry and other key sections of the working class.

Saturday's rally was an attempt to mutually reinforce the credibility of the Teamsters, the UAW and the Democrats, and to sow illusions among workers that a struggle can be waged if the initiative is left in the hands of the union bureaucracies. The venue, which was held inside a Teamsters local hall, was chosen to enable the union apparatus to vet attendees and prevent oppositional voices from being heard.

O'Brien, as has become customary for him, gave eight or

nine minutes of boilerplate remarks, replete with foul language, to give the impression of an angry militant. In his comments, O'Brien also repeated his claims that UPS workers "heroically" stayed on the job in the teeth of the pandemic and that the company acted "with total disregard for you and your families." In reality, it was the Teamsters bureaucracy that enforced UPS's demands that workers stay on the job, leading to massive infections and countless deaths. In other words, both entities showed equal disregard for the lives and health of workers and their loved ones.

A key point in his remarks was when O'Brien claimed that he has repeatedly "warned" the Biden administration not to intervene at UPS. "My neighborhood where I grew up in Boston, if two people had a disagreement and you had nothing to do with it—you just kept walking ... We don't need anybody getting involved in this fight." He also indirectly referenced Biden's appointment of Gene Sperling as the government overseer of the auto contract talks.

This is absurd, given that O'Brien and the Teamsters gave over the podium to Ocasio-Cortez, who has also endorsed Biden for reelection, so that she could lie about her own record and that of the Democrats. "This is about ... demanding respect for our workers," Ocasio-Cortez declared. "And we want you all to know that we have your back in this." Adding salt to the wound, she added, "If we don't stand up for ourselves, nobody will stand up for us," without acknowledging that she had voted to legally prohibit railroad workers from standing up for themselves.

This is only part of a relentless campaign by the Teamsters bureaucracy to whitewash the record of the Democrats, as well as Republicans, on the railroads. For the past month, the Teamsters' Twitter account has also been retweeting the "support" for UPS workers of dozens of other members of Congress who had voted to ban a strike.

O'Brien himself is a regular visitor at the White House, having made the trip seven times in 2022, according to White House visitor logs. Several meetings took place at key points during the rail struggle, where O'Brien played a crucial role in stalling for time to allow Congress to preemptively ban strike action. Nearly half of the unionized workforce on the major railroads are members of the Teamsters. At a rally in Southern California this spring, O'Brien lied to workers and claimed that Biden had not intervened against railroaders.

The most recently released records show that O'Brien visited the White House a further three times in the first three months of 2023. No official account of these meetings were given either by the White House or by the Teamsters, an indication of their sensitive character.

In other words, while O'Brien claims he is demanding, in the manner of a vulgar street thug, that Biden "stay out" of UPS, in reality he and the rest of the bureaucracy are acting as the government's tools in suppressing strikes and enforcing real wage cuts. The railroad struggle shows that Biden is fully

prepared to rip up workers' democratic rights to accomplish this, but the White House prefers to utilize the union bureaucracy to enforce de facto strike bans.

The UAW is using a similar playbook. Fain has made a show of forgoing the traditional handshake with auto CEOs at the start of the contract talks and instead held "membership handshake" PR stunts at the factory gates. Fain has also withheld, for the moment, his endorsement of Biden's reelection even though he is deeply involved in talks with the White House and Democrats over the transition to electric vehicles. Fain agrees that workers must bear the full cost of this transition—which is critical for Biden's trade war and military policies against China—as long as the financial and institutional interests of the UAW bureaucracy are protected.

The Fain administration has already isolated and betrayed the Clarios battery strike, even instructing workers to handle scab batteries in the assembly plants. An internal memo leaked this March explained that the top priority of the Fain administration would be to beat back autoworkers' "unreasonable expectations" in the next contract.

Saturday's rally is a serious warning to workers. The most powerful working class movement in decades is underway in the United States and around the world, but the union bureaucracy, far from being "pressured" into organizing a fight, is directing all of its energies towards thwarting the initiative of the rank and file in order to defeat this movement.

Workers cannot allow themselves to be lulled to sleep by the bureaucracy's empty phrases about "solidarity" and "unity." Instead, they must organize to seize the initiative, developing alternative structures to transfer power from the apparatus to workers themselves. This means the development of the growing network of rank-and-file committees all around the world.



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