

DSA, Teamsters for a Democratic Union promote UPS sellout contract

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Since the announcement of last week's tentative agreement at UPS, the Democratic Socialists of America has falsely hailed it as a major victory for the working class.

Jacobin, the de facto organ of the Democratic Socialists of America, re-posted an article from *Labor Notes* stating that the contract was “[ending] Tiers and [raising] Part-Timer Pay.”

“It’s clear that their strike threat paid off in a big way,” the article declared, and favorably quoted a member of the bargaining committee.

Jacobin also published an article over the weekend presenting the new \$21 an hour starting rate for part-time warehouse workers as a bellwether for Amazon workers. “UPS Teamsters used a strike threat to win big wage increases in their tentative agreement,” the article claimed. “Amazon workers are looking at the pay gains as proof they can do the same.”

In reality, as a result of decades of sellouts, UPS part-timers have made much less than non-union Amazon workers for years, and the new wage pushes their pay to only slightly above that level. *Jacobin* is attempting to spin the new rate to promote the Teamsters’ campaign to unionize Amazon, which it sees as a vast reservoir of potential union dues.

The DSA similarly announced on its official Twitter account: “We applaud the Teamsters for their historic contract campaign. DSA has been proud to stand with the union in supporting their campaign at the gates, and stands with them as they vote to accept or reject the TA.” DSA congresspeople such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal Bowman, who voted last year to ban a strike on the railroads, also chimed in with their own “congratulations.”

The deceitful response of the DSA is in total contrast to the furious opposition of workers to the agreement. The deal’s inadequate starting wage of \$21 for part-timers, who make up two-thirds of the workforce and who work between 3 and 4 hours a day, leaves them in poverty. The contract also includes below-inflation wage increases for drivers. Workers are particularly angry over the freeze in the company’s contribution to pensions in much of the country.

For months, the Teamsters under General President Sean O’Brien had pledged to call a strike of its 340,000 members by August 1 if an “historic” deal was not in place by then. Workers

are particularly angry now that this has been exposed as a sham, the purpose of which was to get in front of the rank-and-file to keep them from breaking out of the bureaucracy’s control.

The DSA has all but endorsed the tentative agreement because that has been the aim of its intervention in the UPS struggle from the onset. They are not socialists at all, but a faction within the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party.

Their role in the UPS contract exposes yet again that the DSA’s political function is to keep workers trapped behind these pro-capitalist organizations and prevent the emergence of an independent movement of the working class. Behind the DSA stands the capitalist state and the Biden administration. The White House is attempting to rein in workers, prevent strikes and force through concessions through a two-pronged strategy, using the services of the corrupt union bureaucracy or, where that fails, direct government intervention.

The DSA is involved in providing cover and credibility for both. Last year, it endorsed a White House-brokered contract on the railroads in almost identical terms to those it uses now at UPS. When workers voted that contract down, the DSA members then voted in the House to impose a strike ban. It played a central role in the Democrats’ maneuvering over sick days designed to ensure its passage.

The DSA, together with the bogus “reform” faction, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, have promoted the O’Brien administration for years, presenting it as the representative of a “rank-and-file” movement in the Teamsters union against former union president James Hoffa, Jr.

For the past year, the DSA has been mobilizing its membership across the country to support the Teamsters’ fraudulent “strike-ready campaign.” They helped organize and promote rallies, “practice pickets” and other organizational activities that were kept firmly under the control of the bureaucracy. O’Brien made public appearances with DSA elected officials and attended online webinars sponsored by TDU.

The significance of their role as the Teamsters’ de facto public relations department was acknowledged in comments made by O’Brien to *Jacobin* last year. “I need TDU just as much as TDU needs me,” O’Brien said. The magazine added, “In a sign of the coalition’s continuance, some TDU leaders now hold key roles in the union.”

The promotion of O’Brien and TDU has been the centerpiece of the DSA’s work in the trade unions, and it has held up their

activity here as a model to be emulated. Typical headlines published by *Jacobin* over the last several years include: “After Electing New Leadership, the Possibilities for the Teamsters Are Enormous,” “With Reformers Victorious, It’s a New Day for the Teamsters” and “The Teamster Revolt Against the Hoffa Era.” *Labor Notes*, a publication with close ties to TDU, also invited O’Brien to speak at its convention last year.

The election of O’Brien, *Jacobin* claimed shortly after he took office, was potentially “one of the most consequential events in recent years for shaping the future of the US labor movement.” The election results were a mandate for “a different, more militant model of unionism,” it wrote, claiming that O’Brien “openly called for more strikes and more confrontation with employers during the campaign.” In reality, the vast majority of workers treated the election with indifference, reflected by the 12 percent turnout, then the lowest in the history of direct union elections in the United States. (That mark has since been beaten by last year’s elections in the United Auto Workers.)

Jacobin then contradicted itself in the same article by acknowledging O’Brien’s actual record was that of “a loyal Hoffa lieutenant” who “helped to impose contracts and threatened” opponents of his regime. But an endorsement of such a corrupt gangster was justified, they claimed, because “it was the best available option.”

In other words, O’Brien was the “best available option” because he was the only challenger with substantial support within the corrupt union apparatus. What they reject out of hand as “sectarian” or “ultra-left” is the *World Socialist Web Site’s* call for workers to overthrow the bureaucracy as a whole and transfer power to the workers through the establishment of rank-and-file committees.

The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee has held substantial online meetings involving hundreds of workers in recent weeks. This terrifies the DSA and TDU, who are now lashing out.

At this past weekend’s DSA National Convention, Sean Orr, a co-chair of TDU, nervously acknowledged opposition to the contract among workers. “We forced the company to a TA. We wanted to strike these bastards,” Orr claimed, contradicting himself. “Unless this TA is voted down, we’re going to have to wait a little bit. But that doesn’t mean the fight is lost ... Now, what we’re dealing with here is a situation with dissatisfaction. I’ve talked to so many co-workers who are like ... ‘I’m not sure that it’s enough.’”

On Twitter, however, Orr was far clearer about his attitude towards this “dissatisfaction” when he declared it was the product of outside agitators: “Nobody has the right to tell our coworkers ‘Hey, I know better about your conditions than you do. Do what I say,’” he said. “Groups like this don’t believe in workers figuring out this world for themselves. They see us as pieces for them to play with.”

This turns reality upside-down. It is the Teamsters bureaucracy, including TDU, who see the workers as “pieces to play with,” and who are demanding workers “do what I say” by approving the tentative agreement. Those who encourage workers to organize themselves are denounced for not allowing “workers to figure out this world for themselves” by having the contract shoved down

their throats.

Ken Paff, a founder and former National Organizer for TDU, is also distributing a letter claiming that the pension contribution freezes for workers in the western United States was a “lie” being spread by “bad actors.” Workers responded with contempt to the letter on a popular messageboard. “TDU is no longer credible,” one worker said. “They are desperate,” another worker suggested, if “they’ve had to bring Ken Paff out of retirement.”

The DSA is already moving on to its next sellout. Its involvement in the “reform” of the United Auto Workers, where a national contract for the Detroit automakers expires next month, is copied from the script used at the Teamsters. Together with the TDU-like Unite All Workers For Democracy caucus, they supported career official Shawn Fain as a “reform” candidate in last year’s presidential election, and now have members in the union’s top leadership, including in the executive board. While *Jacobin* has retired its coverage of UPS for the moment, a headline at the top of its front page blares: “The New UAW Is Ready to Fight the Big 3 Automakers.”

While hailing the UAW as the site of the next great bureaucratic self-revival, the DSA and *Jacobin* kept a hostile silence on the campaign of Will Lehman, a rank-and-file autoworker who ran on a platform of abolishing the bureaucracy and putting workers in control of the UAW. They are promoting the UAW as having been “democratized” while ignoring substantial evidence uncovered by Lehman of massive vote suppression in the election, which saw the lowest turnout (nine percent) in the history of direct union elections.

The record of the DSA only underscores the need for workers to organize and act independently of the trade union apparatus and the pro-capitalist political setup. As long as these forces retain control over the working class, the only possible outcome is a sellout. This is why the WSWS supports the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which declared in its founding statement:

Everything indicates that despite the public rhetoric, we are dealing with the same old Teamsters bureaucracy which violates our rights and enforces sellouts. The only response must be 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. We must prepare action from below to impose the principle that the will of 340,000 UPS workers takes absolute priority over everything else.



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