

Workers at Ontario, California Amazon facility to vote on joining Amazon Labor Union

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Workers at Amazon's ONT8 fulfillment center in Moreno Valley, California, will soon vote on whether to join the Amazon Labor Union (ALU). A union election has been scheduled for the facility, but the date has not been made public. The ONT8 fulfillment center employs about 2,300 workers.

The ONT8 facility is in the Inland Empire, a large region in southern California that is of great importance to Amazon's business. Situated east of Los Angeles, the region encompasses parts of Riverside and San Bernardino counties. It provides Amazon with access to major highways and rail lines and is near the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, which are among the biggest in the United States. Nearly one third of all cargo coming into the country passes through these ports. These factors would give an organized movement of Amazon workers in the region significant leverage in a fight against the company.

The area is also an important center of the opposition of Amazon workers worldwide. At Amazon's KSBD air hub nearby, workers have been carrying out a series of walkouts and pickets outside the facility to demand an increase in pay to \$25 per hour.

But regardless of the election result at ONT8, Amazon workers will still have to organize their independent strength through structures which they genuinely control. They will not find in the leadership of the upstart Amazon Labor Union a means through which they will be able to organize a struggle. Ontario Amazon workers must organize rank-and-file committees to seize the initiative, link up with workers at Amazon and other logistics companies around the world and develop an independent strategy to win their demands.

Around the world, the trade unions are controlled by unaccountable bureaucracies which sell out the workers they claim to represent in order to develop corrupt ties with management and the two big business parties. The bureaucracy is terrified of the prospect of a movement from below, which would threaten to upend their privileges and six-figure salaries drawn from workers dues money, and direct all of their efforts towards preventing this.

The leadership of the upstart ALU, while not yet controlling the billions of dollars of the more established unions, is oriented towards the bureaucracy and the pro-corporate Democratic Party, not to rank-and-file workers, and has integrated itself with them as their junior partners. After the ALU's victory in a unionization vote at Amazon's JFK8 facility in Staten Island, New York in April of 2022, the ALU leaders leveraged the publicity which the victory produced into rubbing elbows with anti-worker politicians like President Biden, who went to Congress last year to ban a rail strike, and corrupt union officials such as Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien, who bought Biden the time he needed to ban the rail strike.

Earlier this year, the Teamsters then blocked a strike at UPS and rammed through a sellout contract which did not meet any of workers' demands. ALU accepts hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations and office space from bureaucrats who hoped to use their support for the supposedly "militant" ALU as a smokescreen for their own betrayals.

This has produced a disaster for rank-and-file workers who voted for ALU to organize a fight against the brutal, low-wage employer. At JFK8, ALU still does not have a contract and Amazon refuses to negotiate

with it. Wages, benefits and working conditions have not improved, and the JFK8 workers are no closer to achieving their first contract than they were before the election. The ALU officials and staffers are totally distant from workers at the facility, who now view the ALU with deep skepticism and contempt. It has not even held a leadership election, leaving workers without even a minimal, formal way of influencing the work of the organization.

Subsequent campaigns at other facilities have ended in disaster. The upcoming election will not be the first that was attempted at ONT8. In October 2022, workers gathered 800 signatures at the fulfillment center and filed a petition for a union election. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) confirmed that the signatures indicated sufficient interest to hold an election. But less than two weeks later, the petition was withdrawn without explanation. Chris Smalls, president of the ALU, minimized the importance of this retreat and said that the petition would be refiled in a few weeks.

The withdrawal of the petition was the latest in a series of setbacks for the ALU. It occurred mere days after workers at the ALB1 warehouse in Castleton-on-Hudson, New York, voted by a two-to-one margin against joining the union. The defeat at ALB1 followed another defeat at the LDJ5 warehouse in Staten Island, New York, located across the street from JFK8. To date, the only facility where the ALU has won an election is the JFK8 warehouse.

The ALU blames these defeats on the opposition of Amazon, but the reality is that the ALU was completely unwilling to raise any demands among workers and did not even establish significant contact with workers in these facilities. Instead, the elections were driven entirely by support from Democrats and high ranking union officials.

A “mass membership meeting” that the ALU held on August 19 at JFK8 drew more union bureaucrats and Democratic officials than Amazon workers, even though it was held across the street from the facility during a shift change. Speakers included Democratic politicians such as New York State Senator Jessica Ramos and former Ohio state senator Nina Turner. Stacy Davis Gates, president of the Chicago Teachers Union and vice president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, also addressed the small gathering. Gates is hated among Chicago teachers for forcing teachers and

students back to school during surges of the pandemic in 2021 and 2022.

Workers at the ONT8 hub and facilities around the world want to organize a fight against Amazon, which has become synonymous with low wage, high tech exploitation. There is enormous potential, given that Amazon employs 1.5 million people around the globe and occupies a central role in world supply chains, to build a powerful movement attracting the support of workers around the world. But to do this, Amazon workers must take the initiative into their own hands.

Amazon workers’ real allies are workers around the world who are beginning to fight back against the corrupt union apparatus through building rank-and-file committees. This includes workers at UPS, where a rank-and-file committee is fighting against a new contract with starting wages imposed by the Teamsters union which are little better than at Amazon, in the auto industry, where the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Network is fighting against the United Auto Workers’ sabotage of a national auto strike by limiting it to a handful of facilities, the Postal Workers Committee, which is fighting against the Amazon-style restructuring of the US Postal Service, and many others around the world. These committees are united in a single organization, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which provides the forum for collaboration and joint action based on a common strategy.

These are the examples that workers at ONT8 and every other Amazon facility must follow. Waging a serious fight against the trillion-dollar company will require workers to establish their independence from the trade unions and the capitalist parties. Rank-and-file committees will enable workers to share information, formulate demands, develop the strategy for their fight and strengthen their position by reaching out to other workers for support.



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