

# New York JFK8 Amazon workers walk out during October Prime Day

Erik Schreiber  
19 October 2023

Amazon workers walked out last Wednesday at the JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island, New York to demand a living wage and better working conditions. The walkout coincided with this year's Prime Big Deal Days sale and took place from 5 PM to 7 PM. Workers on the day shift left the warehouse one hour early, and those on the night shift arrived at work one hour late.

Prime Days are giant sales that Amazon holds every year for its Prime members, with this year's Prime Day selling 375 million items worldwide. In addition to this sale, which the company generally holds in July, Amazon has inaugurated a second event, Prime Big Deal Days, in October. Both events require grueling overtime shifts for Amazon workers to meet demand.

The walkout at JFK8 was organized by the Amazon Labor Union's (ALU) Democratic Reform Caucus, which was established earlier this year in opposition to the leadership around Chris Smalls. ALU won a union election at the facility early last year, but has suffered a series of high profile setbacks as the upstart organization has integrated itself with the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO union bureaucracy.

An ALU reform caucus organizer spoke to *More Perfect Union* about the job action.

"So this is our first major walkout that we've organized as a caucus. We're doing it during Prime week because the pay is not where it needs to be and the workers here deserve better and we're calling on Amazon to return our bonuses—because we used to get holiday bonuses, now we don't—the return of profit-sharing, because workers here used to get stocks and now we don't. They're slowly peeling back what we get, and it's not okay."

Michelle Valentin Nieves, vice president of the ALU, also attended and supported the rally. "We need a contract NOW!" she wrote on social media. "We need

paid sick leave NOW! We need job security NOW!" More than a year and a half after it won an election at JFK8, the ALU has not achieved any of these things for Amazon workers.

In a video posted to X (formerly Twitter), a few dozen workers could be seen participating in the walkout. To the extent that participation was low (JFK8 employs over 8,000 workers), this did not reflect workers' satisfaction with conditions at JFK8, but their lack of confidence in either factions of the ALU. This attitude was evident in August, when the union held what it billed as a mass membership meeting that no rank-and-file workers attended. ALU officials made no attempt to encourage workers waiting at a bus stop only a few hundred feet away to attend.

The reform caucus, which was founded by former ALU officials, says it opposes Smalls's anti-democratic tactics and suppression of dissenting opinions. On its website, it states that "ALU is making no progress." But neither the union's current leadership nor the reform faction has a strategy that will break the impasse and lead JFK8 workers to victory.

Both factions support the established trade unions, which have long since become accomplices of the companies in betraying strikes and imposing concessions on workers. The role of the unions is evident in the auto workers' strike, to take but one example. Even though auto workers at Ford, GM and Stellantis voted overwhelmingly to strike, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain has kept more than three-quarters of them on the job without a contract. The handful of facilities where Fain has called a strike were carefully chosen so as not to interfere with the automakers' production or profits.

In addition, both factions of the ALU leadership support the Democratic Party, which long ago lost any

connection to the working class or social reform. Smalls has allied himself with President Joe Biden, Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, among others. These Democrats collaborated with Republicans to ban a strike of freight railroad workers last year and to impose a pro-company contract that the workers had already rejected. They and their party fully support Israel in its genocidal attack on Gaza. They continue to lavish arms and aid on the neo-Nazi-ridden Ukrainian government, fully aware that they are risking nuclear war between NATO and Russia.

The ALU's failure to achieve any gains for workers at JFK8 has not prevented it from asking them for money. On October 4, Smalls sent an email to JFK8 workers announcing that the union had set itself the goal of raising \$100,000—using the Democratic Party-affiliated fundraising nonprofit, ActBlue—“to support our efforts in continuing to protect the 8,300+ members of JFK8 and ultimately the 2 million Amazon workers worldwide.” Smalls did not explain how the ALU has protected workers or give details about the union's plans for future efforts.

Smalls also stated in the email that “Amazon has continued to stall negotiations” and achieving a contract could take as long as four years. The ALU simply accepts that the JFK8 workers will have to work without a contract for a protracted period (which, considering Amazon's intransigence and indifference to the law, could easily last longer than four years). He offers no proposal to strike, to reach out to other workers or call for a genuine discussion of rank-and-file workers on a fighting strategy. The statement is an implicit admission that the ALU will continue its bankrupt strategy of appealing to the Democrats, the trade unions and the capitalist courts.

The ALU has led JFK8 workers nowhere, but to wage a genuine fight against Amazon, workers will have to create a new organization that objectively represents their interests, not those of the trade union bureaucrats or the capitalist state. Like auto workers, UPS workers, postal workers, teachers and others, JFK8 workers will need to form an independent rank-and-file committee that they control democratically. Through such a committee, Amazon workers will be able to formulate demands, develop a strategy for winning them, and reaching out to workers at other Amazon facilities not

only in New York, but also worldwide.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**