

Teamsters president meets with would-be Führer Donald Trump

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Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien held a private meeting with former president Donald Trump last Wednesday. The meeting took place only three days before the third anniversary of Trump's coup attempt of January 6, 2021, when fascistic militia groups stormed the US Capitol to disrupt and block the certification of Joe Biden's election victory.

The content of the discussions were not made public. On Twitter/X, the Teamsters union presented a glowing account of the meeting, calling it an "in-depth and productive discussion on workers issues most important to the Teamsters union."

In reality, the interests of workers could find no reflection in a secret meeting between the would-be Führer Trump, who is continuing his conspiracy to overthrow the US Constitution and establish a dictatorship, and O'Brien, a pro-company union bureaucrat and sellout artist. Only days before the meeting, management announced hundreds of layoffs at UPS, where O'Brien and the Teamsters apparatus pushed through a pro-corporate contract last summer which they falsely claimed to be the richest in company history.

At multiple points in their account of the meeting, the Teamsters and O'Brien referred to Trump as "President Trump," adopting the latter's styling of himself as the "rightful" president and lending credence to Trump's baseless claim that the 2020 election, which Biden won by 7 million votes, was "stolen."

The right wing celebrated O'Brien's meeting with Trump. "Trump holds private meeting with top union boss, vexing liberals," Fox News gloated. Trump also posted about the meeting on Truth Social, his right-wing alternative to Twitter/X. "Looking forward to more discussions about important issues in the near future!" he declared.

The Teamsters union presented the extraordinary meeting as simply a routine exercise prior to the union's formal endorsement of a candidate for US president. The union has even invited Trump to a further "roundtable" discussion at its headquarters later this month.

But there is nothing routine about O'Brien's meeting with Trump. While an endorsement of Biden may still be more likely, it cannot be excluded that the Teamsters may endorse an out-and-out fascist for president. It should be noted that for several decades, the Teamsters backed Republican candidates in presidential elections. This was in retaliation against Robert F. Kennedy's legal pursuit of former Teamsters President Jimmy Hoffa over the union's ties with the Mafia.

Regardless of whatever its formal endorsement may turn out to be, however, the meeting by O'Brien with Trump is a gift to the extreme right, allowing the billionaire con-man to grotesquely posture as a friend of workers.

From the standpoint of safeguarding its own venal interests, the bureaucracy is likely seeking to hedge its bets, keenly aware of the deep crisis in the Biden camp, whose candidate is obviously physically and mentally failing and is deeply unpopular especially due to his involvement in the Israeli genocide in Gaza. It is signaling its willingness to work with Trump in the event that he becomes president, either through an election or through extra-constitutional means.

The meeting provoked outrage among rank-and-file Teamsters members. "The labor movement dies under people like Trump," one remarked on the Teamsters' Facebook page. "We're not gonna let you off the hook for that Trump photo," said another.

"I find it appalling that my union president is hosting, standing by a man who recently invoked Hitler, several days before the anniversary of the deadly, neo-fascist January 6th assault on the Capitol, who has called Mexicans 'rapists,' has made Islamophobic, anti-Black, anti-trans comments numerous times," a UPS worker from the Pacific Northwest told the WSWs. "O'Brien is opportunistic. By helping to legitimize and rehabilitate a neo-fascist who has promised to be a dictator ... O'Brien is seeking access to the White House in the event of a Trump victory."

The meeting is a massive exposure of all those who claimed that the election of O'Brien was the beginning of a sea change towards "democratic," "rank-and-file unionism" following decades of sellouts. O'Brien, a career bureaucrat and former close ally of his predecessor James Hoffa (son of the more famous Teamsters leader Jimmy Hoffa), relied heavily on enthusiastic support from groups like the Democratic Socialists of America and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) to recast himself as a militant reformer. TDU has yet to issue any statement on the O'Brien-Trump meeting.

O'Brien's elevation to the top Teamsters post was part of an effort to shore up the credibility of the hated union bureaucracy, in order to keep the substantial growth of opposition in the working class from escaping its control. O'Brien's real base of support came not from the rank and file, but from the government and from the Democratic Party. O'Brien is a regular visitor to the Biden White House, and the "liberal" press has spent years

churning out puff pieces about him and other top Teamsters officials.

In reality, O'Brien's administration prepared the next round of sellouts with dishonest and populist-sounding phrases. Last year it sought to head off opposition among workers at UPS by falsely claiming to be preparing a national strike in order to present the sellout it had worked out in advance with management as the product of "tough bargaining." To fight the sellout, workers had to organize themselves independently through the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

A similar operation took place in the United Auto Workers, where new UAW President Shawn Fain forced through a sellout this fall in the auto industry. As thousands of autoworkers are now being laid off in the aftermath of the new contract, CNN Business has hailed Fain as "labor leader of the year"—in effect, a plaudit for services rendered to the ruling class.

To the extent that Trump still has any credibility among workers, it is due to the Democratic Party's utter spinelessness in response to Trump, and the complete bankruptcy of those organizations falsely claiming to be "left."

On Friday, attempting to cloak himself in the American Revolution, Biden spoke at Valley Forge to present his re-election campaign as the country's last best hope for democracy. But the Democrats' failure to do anything to hold Trump responsible for January 6 has allowed Trump to remain a significant political force, with the active support of the majority of the Republican Party.

Meanwhile, while claiming to oppose fascism in this year's presidential election, Biden and the Democrats are openly working with fascists and the extreme right in US proxy wars in Ukraine and in Israel. Domestically, they are also working with neo-Nazis in Congress to ban opposition to war.

O'Brien's meeting with Trump contributes to the disarming of the working class in the face of the danger of dictatorship. But it also expresses the anti-democratic, essentially fascistic outlook of the union bureaucracy itself. Filled with hatred and fear of the working class, entirely dependent on its close connections with management and with the state, the bureaucracy directs all of its energy towards trying to hold the working class in a "state of forced disunity," as Trotsky once observed of fascist regimes.

Ideologically, the policy of the union bureaucracy is based on corporatism, i.e., unrestrained class collaboration, which was explicitly adopted by the UAW and other unions in the 1980s. This reactionary ideology, first pioneered in fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini, is based on the rejection of the class struggle, instead upholding the unity of the bureaucracy with the corporations and the government in the interests of the "nation" against its foreign enemies.

The economic nationalism and "American-first" chauvinism of the AFL-CIO, the gangsterism it employs against militant workers and visceral hatred of socialism has long made the union apparatus fertile ground for the growth of fascist tendencies.

The corporatist integration of the unions is something which the Biden administration has been actively building up. Biden's self-characterization as the most "pro-labor president in American history" really means he is working directly with the bureaucracy

to enforce sellout contracts, prevent strikes and ensure the security of US supply chains as his administration barrels into war across Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

This policy was most directly exposed in his decision, together with Democrats in Congress, to ban a potential strike by railroad workers in late 2022. O'Brien and other top union officials played a key role, delaying the strike as long as possible to give Congress the time they needed to pass an anti-strike law.

The *New York Times* published a worried piece in response to O'Brien's meeting with Trump, "reminding" its readers that Biden is the "most pro-union president in history." In reality, the *Times* aimed to remind the Teamsters of their close working relationship with Biden. It also listed off things the administration has done for the Teamsters bureaucracy specifically, including recently appointing a top union official to a Department of Transportation advisory committee.

"Yet there was Mr. O'Brien next to a beaming Mr. Trump, whose appeal to working-class voters will be key to his re-election bid," the *Times* declared with amazement.

The meeting also set into motion damage control by the DSA. "Reform and Revolution," an "opposition" faction whose oxymoronic name encapsulates the DSA's function to divert growing support for socialism back into the Democratic Party, attempted to square a circle by defending their support for O'Brien's election while criticizing the rest of the DSA for continuing to stump for him afterwards. In other words, the DSA did too little to maintain the illusion of independence when the inevitable sellout came.

The meeting between O'Brien and Trump is a warning that fascism cannot be fought as long as workers are kept under the thumb of the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. A real and durable opposition to dictatorship can only be mounted on the basis of the political independence of the working class, on the basis of a socialist, internationalist, and anti-capitalist program.



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