Pseudo-left maintains guilty silence on job cuts at UPS, Teamsters courting of fascist Trump

Tom Hall
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Over the last month and a half, management at UPS has been carrying massive job cuts with the collusion of the Teamsters bureaucracy. The cuts have been made possible by a contract which the Teamsters falsely hailed as a "historic" victory for workers and now is being exposed as a historic sellout. Meanwhile, top Teamster officials have been meeting with would-be fascist dictator Donald Trump and are apparently seriously considering endorsing him for president.

This has produced a serious crisis in the pseudo-left groups, which act as cheerleaders for the labor bureaucracy, and who have sold the new union administration of Sean O'Brien as the start of a "democratic unionist" reform movement. These include, in particular, the Democratic Socialists of America, *Labor Notes* and Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

The DSA long promoted O'Brien through its *de facto* house organ *Jacobin* and provided its membership to the bureaucracy as foot soldiers for the bogus "strike-ready" campaign, which it used to sell the contract. *Labor Notes*, long a fixture among so-called union "reform" movements pitched to appeal to the bureaucracy, likewise hailed O'Brien and invited him to speak at its 2022 convention. Teamsters for a Democratic Union, which also has close ties to the DSA and to *Labor Notes*, in particular, played a critical role in O'Brien's 2021 campaign for union president and were rewarded with high-level positions in the union apparatus.

In reality, O'Brien was installed as the union's General President in an election with record low turnout, as part of an operation to refurbish the tattered credibility of the union bureaucracy. All three of these organizations played critical roles in whitewashing his record as a career bureaucrat and notorious thug and recasting him as a rank-and-file militant.

The DSA, Labor Notes and TDU's sister group Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) have played the same role in the United Auto Workers. They provided key backing for "reform" President Shawn Fain, installed in an operation involving the Democratic Party and the Justice Department in an election with serious irregularities. The UAW under Fain then pushed through a contract last year which has paved the way for thousands of job cuts and is now backing "Genocide Joe" Biden for president.

These groups have hardly even acknowledged the mass layoffs, either at UPS or in the auto industry. Nor have they said anything about last month's Teamsters roundtable with Donald Trump, which the former president and coup plotter used as a platform to launch an anti-immigrant tirade.

They are responding by simply pretending that these events have not happened, instead presenting a rosy picture of the union bureaucracy being swept from one "organizing" success to the other. Typical headlines appearing in the pseudo-left press this year include, "In the Teamsters and UAW, Historic Victories Were Due to Decades of Union Reform Efforts" (*Jacobin*), "Teamster Food Service Drivers Took Their Strike Nationwide and Won" (*Labor Notes*) and, in perhaps the only instance where the layoffs have even been acknowledged, "Fight Layoffs with Contract Enforcement" (TDU). In reality, the UPS contract contains no protections against job losses due to automation.

This is not only a lie of omission; it is a guilty silence. The pseudo-left bear direct responsibility for the mass layoffs which are taking place and play a key role in the union bureaucracy's promotion of imperialist war and dictatorship. The DSA and other pseudo-left organizations are not only oriented towards the labor apparatus. They comprise an important section of the bureaucracy whose function is to impose the dictates of the corporations and the global interests of the American ruling class.

Creatures of the state

They are also creatures of the state, playing a critical role in Biden's labor policy in particular. The self-described "most pro-labor president in American history" is spearheading the jobs massacre underway in the US and world economy. In addition to a high interest rate policy aimed at spiking unemployment, Biden is using the services of the bureaucracy to sabotage the class struggle and enforce sellout contracts which pave the way for job cuts.

When railroad workers rebelled against the sellout contract brokered by Biden with the unions in 2022, he did not hesitate to openly ban strike action and impose the contract. Several members of the DSA in Congress, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, voted in favor of the strike ban.

The reliance of the pseudo-left on the state was admitted with perhaps unintentional frankness in the above *Jacobin* article, where author Barry Eidlin argues that these supposed successes were made possible through "the combination of top-down government intervention to address massive union leadership corruption, and bottom-up rank-and-file reform movements capable of seizing the opportunity that government intervention created."

Of course, *Jacobin* never bothers to answer the obvious question: If the US capitalist state, the most ruthless institution in the world, installed these people to head the trade unions, isn't it because they are trusted servants of corporate America?

In reality, it was the pseudo-left working with the government who backed these officials, and not the "rank and file," whose opinions were systematically excluded. O'Brien was elected Teamsters president on the lowest turnout in US union history, a feat which was surpassed a year later by Fain in the UAW. The UAW bureaucracy did as little as possible to

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inform workers about the election or update their mailing lists, effectively preventing hundreds of thousands from voting. The pseudo-left simply ignored this. It also opposed the election campaign of Will Lehman, an actual rank-and-file autoworker and socialist who ran for president on a platform of abolishing the bureaucracy.

The Teamsters bureaucracy, Trump and the extreme right

Now it has emerged that the pseudo-left has backed and provided cover for a Teamsters administration with extreme-right and even fascist sympathies. This shows there is no line which the pseudo-left will not cross.

This includes an open endorsement of Trump himself. The Teamsters General Executive Board includes two TDU-aligned members, Matt Taibi and Willie Ford (a third, John Palmer, was formerly a member of TDU before breaking with the faction). They almost certainly were present at last month's roundtable with Trump, which was required for all GEB members. Neither of them even attempted to publicly distance themselves from the meeting.

Meanwhile, it has emerged that the Teamsters GEB voted to donate $45,000 to the Republican National Committee. The WSWS has received unconfirmed reports that the proposal passed with only Palmer and one other member voting against.

To the extent that any concerns have been raised about the Teamsters' courting of Trump, it is from the standpoint that this will have a devastating impact on the credibility of TDU and the Teamsters as a whole, and lead workers to conclude it is necessary to take matters into their own hands and build rank-and-file committees to dismantle the entire bureaucratic structure, rather than seek illusory "reforms."

This was the substance of a recent comment in *Counterpunch* by Joe Allen, a former longtime TDU activist and author of *The Package King*, a pro-TDU history of the Teamsters union at UPS. "Last summer, the Teamsters were riding a wave of goodwill and favorable publicity," Allen writes. "Much of the US Left, especially the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), encouraged dozens of their members to get jobs at UPS, while over one hundred of their branches pledged support for their Strike Ready campaign."

But these "[e]xpectations collapsed quickly with a last-minute deal [that] was cut" between the Teamsters and UPS, Allen laments, a deal which left politically inexperienced young people sent into UPS by the DSA "confused and in some cases very demoralized by their experience," he says.

"Sean O'Brien's courting of the far right, including meetings with Ohio [Senator] J.D. Vance and Missouri's Josh Hawley," as well as with Trump, "has not been addressed publicly by those in the U.S. Left, who spent the last several years promoting him," Allen declares.

As a matter of fact, the *World Socialist Web Site* has already written numerous times on the subject, which Allen well knows. This is exactly what he is afraid of. Allen has been heavily involved in Teamsters Mobilize, a new union faction which called for a "no" vote on last year's contract, but without advocating a rebellion against the bureaucracy as a whole. This was in order to try and prevent the growing disgust with the TDU from finding its way into growing support for UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

Last year, ostensibly responding to an anti-communist attack on the WSWS by a Teamsters official in *Newsweek*, Allen complained that "rank and file Teamsters [are] reading, circulating, and finding answers at the WSWS" because "Unfortunately, the WSWS has been one of the few websites that has consistently focused on the struggles of industrial workers in the United States with its vitriolic attacks on unions, union leaderships, and calls for independent rank-and-file committees," Allen complains, before admitting in dismay that the WSWS "has clearly struck a chord with many."

In other words, the WSWS's consistent record of opposition to the bureaucracy and the fight for rank-and-file control is increasingly intersecting with the growing rebellion by the working class against the pro-capitalist and pro-war bureaucracies.

The UPS sellout and the open courting of Trump does not "[bode] well for the future of TDU," Allen warns in *Counterpunch*. "It was upheld for decades as the model for rank and file reformers to emulate through the U.S. trade union movement. What does it exist for any longer? TDU even tabled at its November convention a motion for a ceasefire in Gaza put forward by members of Teamsters Mobilize (TM). … One member of TM was banned from the TDU convention for criticizing it."

Allen does not attempt, and cannot attempt, to explain the connection between TDU's embrace of right-wing, anti-worker policies and the policies which it has pursued for decades, which Allen still attempts to uphold. TDU and countless other "reform" groups have long bolstered the trade union bureaucracy as the only legitimate form of working class "leadership." Any attempt to organize a rebellion to dismantle the bureaucracy and replace it with democratic forms of control is an expression of "sectarianism."

The fight for socialist consciousness in the working class

Excusing themselves by contemptuous references to the supposed backwardness and weakness of the rank-and-file workers, they have justified alliances with any and all factions within the apparatus as the only game in town. In the process, they have also secured for themselves lucrative positions within the bureaucracy, carrying in some cases six-figure salaries and high-level political connections.

They have long attacked the WSWS for advocating rank-and-file committees as "anti-union" and even slandered the WSWS as pro-company provocateurs, using the crude logic that any opposition to the bureaucracy can only benefit management.

Above all, the state capitalist founders of *Labor Notes* and the TDU specifically opposed the struggle by the Socialist Equality Party and its predecessor, the Workers League, to bring socialist political consciousness into the struggles of the working class and to break workers from the domination of the Democrats and the capitalist two-party system. Instead, they have stuck to "bread and butter" issues, claiming these are the only things workers will understand.

As WSWS writer Tom Mackaman wrote in his 2018 article, headlined, "What is the Teamsters for a Democratic Union?":

> In reality, the banishment of politics meant the exclusion of *socialist* politics. Capitalist politics, especially that espoused by the Democratic Party, was left unchallenged. Behind this was not a fear of alienating workers—who were consistently being radicalized by events—but of alienating sections of the anticommunist trade union bureaucracy, with whom the TDU hoped to collaborate.

This pragmatic, anti-socialist outlook only leads to the most reactionary political outcomes.

Writing against those in the early 20th century who argued against the injection of socialist politics into the economic struggles of the working

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class, Lenin wrote:

> There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a “third” ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. … the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology … for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism … and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie.

The task of genuine socialists, by contrast, is “to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of the revolutionary [movement],” Lenin stated.

Today, the class struggle is unfolding amidst the biggest crisis of world capitalism since the end of World War II. The bureaucracy and its pseudo-left factions are trying to police the boundaries of this crisis to prevent workers from intervening with their own independent program. This is precisely what must take place. The working class must combine its growing rebellion against this apparatus with a socialist program, aimed at ending war, fascism and the capitalist system that causes them and establishing a workers’ state.

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