

Amazon Labor Union announces merger with Teamsters union

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On Monday, Amazon Labor Union members at the JFK8 warehouse in New York City voted to approve a merger with the Teamsters union announced by ALU officials earlier this month. The vote was 878 in favor to 14 against, meaning only a small fraction of the warehouses' 5,000 to 8,000 employees participated.

With the merger, Amazon workers will now be directly confronting a Teamsters apparatus that is helping to enforce mass automation and layoffs, including at one of Amazon's main competitors, UPS. A national sellout contract pushed through last year by the Teamsters bureaucracy has paved the way for over 12,000 layoffs and plans for hundreds of facility closures. UPS managers have cited labor "certainty" provided by the deal as a key factor in its drive to automate "everything."

The Teamsters bureaucracy, as with their counterparts in every other major trade union, are also totally integrated with the two corporate parties. This includes ties with the extreme Republican right. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien met with would-be Führer Donald Trump privately multiple times this year and the union has donated to a Republican Senator centrally involved in Trump's January 6, 2021 coup attempt.

The merger poses the need for a joint struggle of Amazon and UPS workers against the ruthless global logistics firms and to transfer decision making and power from the corrupt Teamsters apparatus to rank-and-file workers. One New York City UPS worker said: "What I see is that they are trying to make money for themselves without care for the workers. We can't let that happen. The union doesn't protect anyone anymore, but their own pocket."

A member of the UPS Rank-and-File Committee who also works in New York said: "I think the union is more corrupt than the companies and are trying to get as much as they can possibly before we get sick of them."

The merger is the inevitable outcome of the ALU's leaders political orientation. A little more than two years ago, ALU won the first-ever union election at an Amazon facility in the United States. Its ability to attract support from

workers was largely due to its presentation of itself as a more democratic and rank-and-file alternative to the bureaucratically-controlled unions of the AFL-CIO.

The vote came several months after a unionization campaign at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama by the RWDSU union, which attracted high-profile political support from the Biden administration, but which ended in humiliating defeat.

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented at the time: "Biden's intervention at Amazon is part of a broader strategy of promoting the unions and integrating them ever more directly into the state apparatus and corporate management." A major factor in this strategy is the preparation of American society for war, in which "the pro-capitalist unions will be critical in promoting national chauvinism and suppressing the class struggle."

The RWDSU's debacle, followed by the victory of ALU, was a reflection that workers are deeply distrustful of, and alienated from the union bureaucracy and both capitalist parties. It showed they are searching for a new means, free of the control of the apparatus, to fight against the exploitation of giant corporations.

But the ALU founders have no strategy on which Amazon workers can fight the giant corporations. Instead, within days of its victory, the union's fledgling officials began accepting massive financial and institutional support from the more established union bureaucracies, including hundreds of thousands of dollars, free Manhattan office space and other perks. This included the Teamsters, which hoped to use support for the ALU to build credibility for its own attempts to extend its organization into Amazon, and create the same corrupt relations with management that it enjoys at UPS and other companies.

ALU officials also traveled to the White House to meet with President Biden and began establishing close political ties to the Democratic Party, especially pseudo-left promoters of the union bureaucracy like the *Labor Notes* publication. ALU leader Chris Smalls shared a stage at the latter's 2022 conference alongside Teamsters head Sean

O'Brien.

The ALU claimed it was possible to combine these opportunistic maneuvers with workplace democracy. But the WSWS warned at the time that “There are two ways forward for workers at the Amazon [warehouse]. One way is the direction the ALU is taking, which is a turn to the AFL-CIO. This leads inevitably to the bureaucratic suppression of the initiative of rank-and-file Amazon workers and the betrayal of their demands. The other way is for workers to develop their independent organization and initiative and build a powerful industrial and political counteroffensive of the working class.”

This prediction has been confirmed. Within weeks of the victory at JFK8, the ALU suffered a series of high-profile disasters, including at the LDJ5 warehouse across the street, after campaigns leveraging the organization’s newfound institutional support. Meanwhile, any connection with rank-and-file Amazon workers have long evaporated. A “mass membership meeting” last year attracted more reporters and Democratic officials than it did any actual workers.

As for workers, they are no closer to winning their demands, including those raised by ALU in the course of its initial election campaign.

The growing anger and distrust among rank-and-file workers, combined with its own internal crisis, have only compelled the upstart ALU bureaucrats to establish a firmer basis of support within the established apparatus. The organization is reportedly in deep financial crisis and is wracked by internal factional conflict. Both the dominant faction led by current president Smalls and a so-called “reform” group negotiated separately with the Teamsters.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration’s corporatist policy, which animated its support for the RWDSU’s campaign, has been greatly expanded. The US is engaged in a new global conflict to dominate the world’s resources and supply chains, spanning from the proxy war in Ukraine to the Israeli genocide in Gaza which Washington is funding.

American imperialism and its NATO allies are on the cusp of deploying combat troops against Russia, raising the danger of nuclear war. Massive new tariffs being slapped on Chinese exports are part of the advanced preparations of the economy for war against China.

The whole of society is being placed on a war footing, with the unions playing a central role. Over the past two years, Biden has relied on the union bureaucracy to prevent strikes and enforce sellouts in industries critical for “national security.” This includes in 2022, when the Teamsters helped to prevent and pre-emptively ban a strike on the railroads, as well as in oil refineries, the docks, the auto industry and others.

In the Teamsters, the UAW and other unions, these

policies are being carried out by “reform” leaders, who were brought to power through state interventions aimed at overcoming deep rank-and-file distrust and which enable the bureaucracy to play its assigned role.

United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain is a key ally of Biden, whose support in the upcoming elections is faltering due to his administration’s involvement in the Gaza genocide. While Fain is hated for his role in helping enforce mass layoffs under a new auto contract, he has tried to suppress campus strikes by UAW members against the genocide.

Fain calls for a new “arsenal of democracy,” a reference to the US war economy during World War II, and has been appointed by Biden to a major trade board to help coordinate economic war with China. Far from ending labor-management collusion and corruption, Fain and several other top UAW officials are being investigated by a federal monitor for financial wrongdoing.

The conflict between workers and the bureaucracy has only grown over the past two years, expressed in the growth of rank-and-file committees across the US and the world. These new organizations, united on a world scale through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, are laying the foundations for a rebellion against the entire corporatist labor framework being imposed on the working class.

Amazon workers must learn the lessons from their experience with ALU. The fight for workplace democracy is incompatible with the profit system and the union bureaucracy which upholds it. It requires a struggle against the whole capitalist oligarchy and the development of an international working class movement connecting the defense of jobs, wages and working conditions with the fight against war.



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