

Amazon Labor Union holds strike vote at JFK8 facility in New York

Erik Schreiber
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The Amazon Labor Union (ALU) is holding a strike authorization vote at the JFK8 fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York. The deadline for votes to be cast is the evening of December 1. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges the largest possible “yes” vote as a necessary first step in the fight against Amazon.

The next step must be the formation of a rank-and-file committee that JFK8 workers control democratically. This committee, which must be independent of the bureaucracy of the ALU and the Teamsters (with which the ALU is affiliated), will be able to conduct a genuine struggle by formulating workers’ demands, elaborating a strategy to achieve them and linking up with other workers, at Amazon and elsewhere, in a common fight against exploitation.

Amazon, the global retail behemoth, recorded approximately \$575 billion in revenue in 2023, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. This revenue was produced by relentlessly pushing workers to their physical limits—and often beyond them. The Black Friday and Cyber Monday protests planned at Amazon facilities in more than 20 countries show workers’ fierce international opposition to the company’s sweatshop regime, which depends on the extensive use of automation and surveillance technology.

Workers at JFK8 cannot fight this massive international corporation alone. They must unite with other Amazon workers in New York, nationwide and around the world. The widespread anger toward Amazon must be organized and channeled into the development of a fighting program.

Moreover, Amazon workers are not alone in facing the threats of surveillance and layoffs resulting from automation. Workers on the East and Gulf Coast docks, at UPS and at the United States Postal Service face the same dangers to their livelihoods. Workers at Canada

Post have been waging a determined strike for about two weeks over similar questions. The workers at JFK8 must appeal to all these workers for support based on their common interests.

Another essential basis for a struggle by Amazon workers must be their rejection of the company’s supposed right to profit from their labor. As they formulate their demands, the starting point for Amazon workers must be their objective needs, without regard to what the company is willing to concede or what it claims it can afford.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, one of the world’s richest men, is just one of the American billionaires whose wealth has increased by almost 90 percent since the beginning of the pandemic. At the same time, the rate of homelessness increased by more than 12 percent throughout 2022, reaching a record high, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Bezos and other billionaires cannot be allowed to hoard the wealth that the working class creates. Instead, they must be expropriated, and the socially created wealth must be used to satisfy social needs.

Equally essential is that not only the struggle, but also the contract negotiations at JFK8 be subject to the workers’ democratic control. At each stage in the fight, the workers must meet and decide on their tactics. Negotiations must be fully transparent and open to all JFK8 workers. Closed-door bargaining and backroom deals lead only to betrayals, as workers in every industry have learned through bitter experience.

Whether or not it honors a “yes” vote and calls a strike, the ALU/Teamsters will operate with a totally different strategy, aimed not at securing massive improvements to working conditions but pressuring management to work out a deal to allow the bureaucracy to “jointly” impose sweatshop conditions.

During its unionization campaign, the ALU organizers won JFK8 workers' support largely because they claimed that their new organization would be controlled by the workers and would be independent of the established trade unions. Workers believed that the ALU was an organization that would help them organize a fight.

But after the ALU's victory, it quickly became apparent that the fledgling union had no strategy for fighting Amazon. Lacking an independent perspective, its leadership turned to the Democratic Party (which represents the interests of Wall Street and the intelligence agencies) and to the very trade unions from which they initially had distanced themselves. This bankrupt orientation left the ALU unable to make successful appeals to workers at other Amazon facilities — including LDJ5, which is across the street from JFK8. The union became so distant from workers that its “mass membership meeting” in August 2023 attracted more Democrats and trade union officials than members.

As the ALU's resources dwindled, its leaders began bickering among themselves. They finally turned toward the Teamsters to rescue them, and the ALU became affiliated with this union in June. More than two and a half years after its election victory, the ALU has nothing to show for itself. Conditions have not improved at all for JFK8 workers.

The Teamsters bureaucracy rescued the ALU not because it sought to improve wages and conditions for JFK8 workers, but because it sought to broaden its base of dues-paying members. The Teamsters officials seek only to preserve their own generous salaries by advancing the companies' interests.

Among the most significant of the union's recent betrayals was its prevention of a strike by 340,000 UPS workers last year. Despite his loud promises to call a strike, Teamsters President Sean O'Brien kept workers on the job after the contract expired. He then produced a “historic” and “overwhelmingly lucrative” tentative agreement that is now enabling UPS to close at least 200 facilities and, in its words, automate “everything.” Company executives later boasted to investors that the agreement provided “labor certainty” and curbed cost increases.

Early this year, the Teamsters called off a strike by 5,000 workers at Anheuser-Busch at the last minute,

despite a 99 percent vote in favor of the action. Union officials again brought forward a “historic” tentative agreement that allegedly contained job protections. But the agreement did not stop Anheuser-Busch from closing two distribution centers this fall, affecting 256 workers. A lawyer for the union admitted that the Teamsters had discussed brewery closures with the company without telling workers.

Workers at JFK8 have no choice but to fight against Amazon's relentless exploitation. But they cannot entrust the leadership of this fight to the ALU or the Teamsters, who will seek every opportunity to secure their own privileges by cooperating with the company. The formation of a rank-and-file committee that is independent of the union and under workers' direct control is essential to waging the necessary struggle. JFK8 workers must unite with Amazon workers internationally in a fight that ultimately takes aim at the profit system itself.



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