

Pseudo-left ‘Build a Fighting NALC’ defends union bureaucrats and Trump against rank-and-file opposition

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8 April 2025

United States postal workers are facing an existential crisis. President Trump and Elon Musk are planning to privatize the United States Postal Service, threatening tens of thousands of jobs and destroying the post office as a public service.

This is bound up with Trump’s drive toward dictatorship. He has ignored court orders, illegally invoked wartime powers, criminalized opposition and is dismantling or privatizing every federal program not directly related to the military or police.

The union bureaucracies, including the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), are enabling Trump by working to block any active opposition from the working class. After city carriers rejected a contract earlier this year by more than 2 to 1, the NALC and its president, Brian Renfroe, sent the deal to binding arbitration, where it was imposed with no significant changes—clearing the way for massive attacks on the postal service.

The task facing workers is to smash the union apparatus and replace it with rank-and-file committees—genuine, democratic organs of workers’ power. This must be combined with the rejection of the bureaucracy’s nationalist, pro-capitalist politics in favor of an internationally unified movement against the capitalist profit system. Only in this way can a viable movement of the working class against dictatorship be built.

As the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee declared in a statement last month, “The only way to save the post office—and American democracy—is through the mass mobilization of the working class ... If only we know how to use [our] power we can defeat the attacks by Trump and his handful of oligarchs and right-wingers.”

What is Build a Fighting NALC?

In the face of growing frustration and anger in the working class, pseudo-left factions of the bureaucracy are deploying “rank-and-file” rhetoric to prevent this opposition from breaking free of the union’s control. In the USPS, one of the main such groups is Build a Fighting NALC (BFN).

BFN insists that workers cannot take action without the permission and support of the bureaucracy. Rather than encouraging a genuine rank-and-file rebellion, they falsely claim that workers can pressure the bureaucracy to reform itself and lead a fight.

In the face of growing political opposition to Trump—expressed in the participation of millions of people in mass protests on April 5—BFN works to divert workers away from a political struggle, promoting narrow and parochial conceptions that reduce everything to the language of a labor contract. Their focus is not only limited to the USPS, but specifically to

the NALC, which represents only about one-third of the total postal workforce.

The danger of fascism—and even Trump’s name—are scarcely mentioned in BFN’s statements. When Trump is referenced at all, it is only in relation to the privatization of the USPS, without any effort to connect this to his broader strategy for establishing a dictatorship.

BFN claims that the Post Office—established during the American Revolution—can be defended through collective bargaining, excluding the necessity of a broader political struggle that counterposes the working class as a whole against the would-be fascist dictator Trump. This, under conditions where Trump is illegally firing tens of thousands of federal workers and has issued an executive order allowing contracts to be torn up at will.

Upholding the bureaucracy

BFN’s proposal for how workers can oppose the NALC executives amounts to mutiny on one’s knees. While they routinely complain about the “conservative” policies of Renfroe—who is widely despised by letter carriers—they issued a fawning open letter to him in March, humbly asking that he “focus exclusively” on the “payable” and the elimination of the second-tier City Carrier Assistants (CCAs) during arbitration talks.

They closed the letter by kissing Renfroe’s ring, declaring, “We appreciate your leadership and remain committed to working together to achieve a fair and just resolution through the arbitration process.”

Another open letter from BFN asked local union officials “to organize discussions to come to an agreement on the best forms of collective action to defend our jobs.” Local branch presidents were encouraged to make room for such discussions at general membership meetings. If executive boards refused, postal workers were urged to gather signatures to petition for the topic to be added to the agenda.

These letters, which ceded all initiative to the bureaucracy and subordinated workers to their authority, amounted to nothing.

The role of *Labor Notes*

BFN is part of a broader grouping of similar factions in other unions serving the same function of blocking a rebellion against the apparatus. BFN was founded at the 2022 conference of *Labor Notes*, a pseudo-left

group behind many “reform” caucuses in the unions.

Since its founding in the 1970s, *Labor Notes* has rejected the fight for socialism in the working class as “utopian” and even “divisive,” claiming instead that workers can wage a purely economic struggle while avoiding a political one. At the same time, it has trailed behind one anti-communist bureaucrat after another, each promoted as the next great union “reformer.”

Connected to this is *Labor Notes*’ entirely subjective explanation for the betrayals of the bureaucracy, blaming them on the wrong policies of top officials or their penchant for “business unionism.” In reality, these betrayals flow inevitably from the material interests of the bureaucracy itself, whose six-figure salaries depend on proving to management and the government that they can enforce labor discipline and suppress opposition.

This is why every single “reform” caucus that has taken over a union has ended up being just as bad—or worse—than the crop of bureaucrats they replaced.

In recent years, as opposition has begun to seriously challenge the bureaucracy’s control, reform factions have been elevated in a far more calculated and conscious operation. *Labor Notes* and its allied factions, including the Democratic Socialists of America, are deeply embedded in the Democratic Party and play a critical role in diverting social opposition into safe channels.

They have even helped bolster illusions in Trump, particularly through support for nationalist economic policies and collaboration with union officials who are aligning with his administration.

The very conference at which BFN was founded featured new Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien—elevated by the Teamsters for a Democratic Union—as a keynote speaker. Yesterday’s supposed “reformer” has now revealed himself as an open Trump supporter. O’Brien is directly responsible for the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs at UPS, where a ruthless restructuring and assault on the workforce is unfolding in parallel to the attacks underway at USPS.

A featured speaker at last year’s *Labor Notes* conference, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain—elected with the backing of the *Labor Notes*-supported Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) faction—is now a key cheerleader for Trump’s trade war. Fain has falsely claimed that Trump’s nationalist economic policies will bring back jobs that the UAW and Fain themselves have helped to destroy.

UAWD backed Fain in explicit opposition to socialist autoworker Will Lehman, who ran in the 2022 UAW election on a platform of building rank-and-file committees to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power to the shop floor.

As Lehman predicted, the only substantial difference after these “reformers” were elected was in their own paychecks. Two former *Labor Notes* staffers, Jonah Furman and Chris Brooks, now occupy top posts in the UAW, each drawing salaries of over \$150,000 a year. Far from opposing the fascist danger, they have issued statements explicitly endorsing Trump’s trade war agenda, exposing themselves as collaborators with a regime bent on dictatorship.

Because BFN wants to replicate this “success” at the NALC, it is compelled to falsify the miserable record of these so-called reformers. Organizing documents and public statements by BFN’s leader, union steward Tyler Vasseur, have heaped praise on both Fain and O’Brien.

Vasseur in particular has fawned over the contracts both unions imposed through lies in 2023, which he presents as examples of militant unionism that forced the companies to “concede far more than they wanted to.” In reality, these contracts led directly to thousands of job cuts almost as soon as they took effect.

Now that the results of arbitration have been announced, BFN counsels workers to wait until the next NALC elections in 2026. Union “candidates” will need to demonstrate a real effort to put forward a vision of an

administration that will break from the business union approach of Renfroe and previous administrations,” BFN claims.

In reality, the experience with the Teamsters and UAW shows they will whitewash the record of whatever bureaucrat is willing to work with them to bolster their own careers, with figures like Vasseur riding their coattails into top union positions.

The right to strike

In recent weeks, in a verbal concession to growing sentiment for action, BFN has begun issuing statements calling on workers to “fight for the right to strike.” Under US labor law, federal employees are banned from striking.

One statement declared: “This is the exact situation that such action calls for, as strike action is the most powerful weapon workers have to fight for our interests. The threat of privatization from the Trump administration makes this more pressing.”

Essentially, this amounts to urging workers to demand that the government—i.e., Trump—“grant” them the right to strike, so that they may be able to walk out at some point in the future.

This is not only a dead end—neither Trump nor the Democrats, who banned a national railroad strike less than three years ago, would ever willingly grant such a right—it is based on a false premise.

Centuries of progressive political thought have held that rights are inalienable and exist whether a government recognizes them or not. In the words of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence: “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.”

The legal recognition of the right to strike was not won through appeals to the powers that be, but through decades of bitter struggles in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in which corporate America did not hesitate to use the courts, the police and the military against workers.

Today, as Trump threatens to violate this and every other basic right of the working class, the only answer is the one taken by the American colonists in the Revolution against the tyranny of the British Crown.

In modern times, the basic force capable of defending democratic rights is the working class. This means mass action, up to and including a general strike. Such a struggle would inevitably involve workers in a political conflict with the Trump administration and the Democratic Party—precisely what BFN rejects.

BFN, however, separating postal and federal workers from the rest of the working class, would have them wait to take action until their “right” to do so is formally acknowledged by the very forces arrayed against them—in other words, never. Were workers to take this advice, this would only ensure that Trump’s plans for dictatorship succeed by paralyzing the opposition from below.

Conclusion

BFN’s program is not simply misinformed—it performs a crucial social function both for the union bureaucracy and capitalism as a whole.

Workers must not allow themselves to be deceived by such groupings! The union bureaucratic apparatus cannot be reformed. It must be smashed and swept away by the rank and file, who must organize themselves independently of the bureaucracy through rank-and-file committees in

every workplace and mobilize a mass movement of the working class.

These new organizations, democratically controlled by the rank and file, will return power to the shop floor and unite the working class across the United States and the entire globe against austerity, fascism and war.

The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is fighting to build such organizations. A recent online meeting sponsored by the IWA-RFC with 150 postal workers and their supporters passed a resolution which declared:

The time for empty statements is over. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee call for immediate preparations for mass resistance ... We reject the dismantling of public services and demand workers' control over critical sectors like the USPS. The only way forward is through the independent organization of the working class, in opposition to both corporate-backed parties and their enforcers in the trade union apparatus.

This is the essential task. Fill out the form below to join the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee!



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