

Nationwide strike by Republic sanitation workers in the US poses need for fight against Teamsters bureaucracy

Marc Wells, Tom Hall
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The strike by more than 2,000 Republic Services sanitation workers, now in its third week, is taking place in major cities from Boston to Los Angeles.

For the ruling elite, the strike is deeply alarming. Trash pickups have halted. Waste piles up on city streets, threatening public health. But this is not what most frightens the corporations and their political servants. The event is a sign of the growing social resistance of the working class. Its logic leads in the direction of a broad confrontation between the workers on one hand, and the corporate oligarchy, its political servants in the two parties and the pro-corporate trade union functionaries on the other.

The strike follows closely on the heels of the largest municipal workers' strike in Philadelphia in nearly 40 years. There, too, sanitation workers played a major role, halting trash collection across the city. That strike could have served as a launching point for a far broader movement. But the AFSCME union deliberately isolated the strike and shut it down at the point when it was at its most powerful, in coordination with the Democratic administration of Mayor Cherelle Parker.

The same playbook is now being used by the Teamsters to suppress the fight at Republic. At Republic, the Teamsters have ordered workers back on the job at several key sites and are rushing to reach a deal before the strike can gain momentum.

On Monday, drivers in Orange County, California, were ordered back to work, with the union claiming the picket line was being relocated to Los Angeles. In reality, this was a concession to Republic and a signal that a sellout is being prepared. On Tuesday, the Teamsters announced it was resuming talks with management—anxious to ram through a deal before workers take control.

New information indicates that the strike is already

being deliberately dismantled. An insider familiar with the situation reports that many of the "barns" (local facilities) are crossing the line, especially those under the jurisdiction of Local 396 in Southern California. The Anaheim yard, where 15 members of Local 952 had honored the extended picket line, has now been sent back to work by Local 952 Secretary-Treasurer Eric Jimenez.

In two additional yards under Local 396, all workers have crossed. Workers describe the extended picket line as "falling apart" under Local 396. That local is headed by Victor Mineros, a recently appointed Western Region Vice President under Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien's administration.

This provides a stark warning of the union's real role—not in defending the strike but in sabotaging it.

This follows a familiar script. The unions stage limited strikes designed to generate publicity while minimizing disruption. That was the case in the 2023 United Auto Workers "stand-up strike," which was deliberately kept narrow and harmless to avoid a serious challenge to auto industry profits.

That same year, the Teamsters claimed to be preparing a national strike at UPS, only to call it off and announce a contract which has since led to tens of thousands of job losses. While Republic workers are on strike, the Teamsters bureaucrats are pretending to oppose UPS driver buyouts in order to get out in front of and smother rank-and-file opposition.

The Teamsters were forced to initiate the strike because of growing anger from below. The conditions at Republic, which include poverty wages, unsafe working conditions and an inferior health plan, have become unbearable. But the bureaucracy never initiates a struggle. It only calls a strike when it fears losing control, then works to contain and demobilize it.

Tom Mari, president of Teamsters Local 25 in Boston, admitted as much when he said, “We tried everything to get a settlement. We even proposed a delay in implementing our health insurance proposal.” In other words, the union was not fighting but pleading, watering down its own demands in hopes of keeping a seat at the table. Even these concessions were rejected.

One of the union’s central demands is for Republic to contribute to the Teamsters’ multi-employer health and welfare fund, rather than managing its own plan. For workers, this is motivated by their fight for better benefits. But for the bureaucracy, the union healthcare funds are a cash cow.

For decades, the unions have responded to declining membership and militancy by transforming themselves into financial entities. Through their control of pension funds, health and welfare trusts, strike funds and legal accounts, they manage enormous pools of capital—invested on Wall Street and entangling them directly with the financial oligarchy.

The Teamsters are among the most deeply enmeshed in this process. Their Central States Pension Fund alone controlled over \$41.7 billion by the end of 2023. In total, union-affiliated pension and benefit funds nationally manage trillions of dollars. While these funds do pay out benefits, they also function as a source of income for the union executives, who sit on boards with corporate and financial managers.

This has helped to fuse the union apparatus ever more tightly to finance capital. The role of the bureaucracy is not to organize opposition to exploitation but to manage it, to suppress resistance and guarantee uninterrupted profits.

The sabotage of the strike takes place under conditions where the Teamsters bureaucracy is moving ever more openly into alliance with Donald Trump and the far right. Teamsters President Sean O’Brien has praised Trump’s economic nationalism, backed his tariffs, and aligned with his campaign’s anti-immigrant platform, under the lie that this defends “American jobs.” This nationalist orientation is the outcome of the pro-capitalist orientation of the bureaucracy.

But the backbone of this strike is composed of immigrant and first-generation workers, exposing the rottenness of the bureaucracy’s “America First” program. These workers do some of the most dangerous and indispensable labor in society. Their leading role in the strike is a living refutation of every reactionary claim that jobs can be defended by attacking migrants or aligning

with trade war.

The politicians crying crocodile tears over “public inconvenience” care nothing for the lives of sanitation workers. Massachusetts Treasurer Deborah Goldberg and Secretary of State William Galvin have urged Republic to “resolve the strike,” citing “disruption.” What they really fear is that the strike could spread and ignite a broader movement. Galvin even raised the prospect of state oversight of sanitation contracts—a clear sign that ruling circles are worried about losing control.

And they have every reason to worry. The strike is being watched by nurses, teachers, public employees, logistics and warehouse workers and by the entire working class.

But for the combined power of the working class to be brought to bear, workers must break out of the straitjacket imposed by the union bureaucracy. That means building new organizations—rank-and-file committees to transfer control from the unaccountable bureaucrats to workers themselves, based on a strategy of class struggle, not collaboration with management.

These committees must unite workers across job sites, industries and regions. They must organize mass meetings, circulate information and prepare a joint offensive against Republic and corporate America in general.

This means turning outward to the working class as a whole in a political struggle. Every major sector, including healthcare, education, logistics and manufacturing, is mired in crisis. Workers face surging costs, falling real wages and intolerable conditions, while trillions are spent on imperialist war and corporate bailouts.

The potential exists for a general strike. But such a struggle demands new leadership, a new program and a complete fight against the pro-corporate union bureaucracy and the two parties of big business.



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