Teamsters for a Democratic Union welcomes Sean O’Brien days after he backs far-right Republicans in midterms

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On November 6, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) welcomed Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien to its national convention in Chicago, just three days after he had endorsed several prominent far-right Republican candidates. Other Teamsters bodies also endorsed leading supporters of Donald Trump.

Approximately 500 TDU members attended the gathering in Chicago. O’Brien appeared alongside General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman at its opening dinner Friday evening.

On November 1, O’Brien declared himself “very proud to have cast a ballot for [Republican] Senator Ashley Moody.” He praised her supposed defense of pensions and jobs and anticipated further cooperation on further legislation. Moody, a Trump-endorsed “America First” Republican, used O’Brien’s statement in her campaign against Democratic opponent Angie Nixon, whom she denounced as a socialist.

As state attorney general, Moody supported the legal challenge to the 2020 election results in four states won by Joe Biden. As senator, she has backed Trump’s expansion of immigration enforcement and his legislation slashing Medicaid and food assistance.

The elections, which were a debacle for Republicans (though Moody herself won re-election), registered a massive growth of opposition among workers and young people, directed against the Trump administration and, more broadly, against declining living standards, inequality, war and attacks on democratic rights. The Democrats won both houses of Congress, with the sharpest swings against Republicans among sections of the working class, rural voters and young men.

The vote also exposes the trade union bureaucracy. Substantial sections of them, enabled by the support of “reform” groups tied to the pseudo-left, have cultivated ties to Trump and the extreme right.

O’Brien was the first Teamsters president to speak at the Republican National Convention in 2024, has cultivated close relations with Trump and leading figures in his administration, and has used his *Better Bad Ideas* podcast to promote Republican politicians, including Josh Hawley, Roger Marshall, Markwayne Mullin and Vivek Ramaswamy.

This expresses the bureaucracy’s deep hostility to the working class, whose struggles they have sabotaged for decades while collaborating in mass layoffs.

Moody was one of several ultra-right candidates endorsed by O’Brien or major Teamsters leadership bodies. Others include:

• **Roger Marshall, Kansas:** O’Brien personally supported the Republican senator, who voted to reject electoral votes following the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol. Marshall also championed Trump’s war against Iran and supported the administration’s attacks on social programs.

• **Rob Bresnahan, Pennsylvania:** Endorsed by O’Brien and the Pennsylvania Conference of Teamsters, Bresnahan voted for Trump’s budget cuts, expanded ICE funding and opposed congressional efforts to end the unauthorized war against Iran.

• **Mike Lawler, New York:** O’Brien campaigned alongside the Trump-endorsed congressman, who supported major elements of Trump’s domestic agenda and opposed efforts to restrict the president’s military operations against Iran.

• **Greg Abbott, Texas:** Teamsters Joint Councils 58 and 80, representing approximately 40,000 workers, endorsed the Republican governor, who militarized immigration enforcement along the Mexican border.

• **Vivek Ramaswamy, Ohio:** The Ohio Conference of Teamsters endorsed the Republican gubernatorial candidate after he had appeared on O’Brien’s podcast and declared that eliminating teachers’ collective-bargaining rights was an option he would consider.

Marshall, Bresnahan, Lawler and Abbott subsequently lost their elections in the Democratic landslide.

O’Brien, who is in regular contact with Trump personally, also has ties to his administration’s would-be fascist shock troops. In March, he publicly supported Trump’s nomination of Markwayne Mullin as secretary of Homeland Security, the department overseeing ICE and Border Patrol, following the killings of Renée Good and Alex Pretti by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis.

“If anyone is willing to stand their butt up to protect America, it’s Markwayne Mullin,” O’Brien declared. He subsequently attended Mullin’s Senate confirmation hearing, sitting behind the nominee, who described the Teamsters president as a close friend.

O’Brien has accompanied this rhetoric with increasingly open attacks on immigrants. During a January 2025 podcast interview with Josh Hawley, he complained about protecting undocumented immigrants who, he claimed, entered the country to commit crimes and steal American jobs.

However, he is only one of many prominent union officials aiding fascist Republicans’ attempts to cultivate a base in the working class by exploiting genuine anger over decades of deindustrialization and declining living standards, directing it against immigrants and foreign workers. The bureaucracy has long used nationalism to pit workers in different countries against each other, justify cuts in the name of

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global “competitiveness,” conceal its collaboration with US corporations against workers at home and abroad and deepen its integration into the state apparatus.

UAW President Shawn Fain, who backed Biden and denounced Trump as a “scab,” has supported Trump’s tariffs while criticizing their implementation. His administration has presided over thousands of auto job cuts. The UAW’s June trade white paper proposed a “tri-national commission” of unions, governments and academics to work with industry in “rationalizing supply chains”—giving union officials a role in overseeing restructuring across North America.

The bureaucracy is auditioning as an anti-labor police force in an authoritarian regime. It already rules its own organizations through authoritarian methods. O’Brien was reelected in June without a membership vote. In the UAW’s 2026 election, fewer than 9 percent of members voted, reflecting both vote suppression and profound alienation from the apparatus.

There is also a quid pro quo at work. Many of the right-wing Republicans courted by O’Brien support the Faster Labor Contracts Act, which would channel unresolved first-contract negotiations through mediation into binding arbitration. That provides a mechanism for imposing contracts without a membership ratification vote. The bureaucracy’s support for the PRO Act likewise reflects its interest in expanding its institutional reach and dues base.

O’Brien’s increasingly open embrace of the extreme right has accompanied his administration’s collaboration with UPS management. O’Brien and TDU promoted the new five-year deal as a historic victory, following a “strike-ready” campaign that ended with a settlement and no strike.

UPS subsequently launched one of the largest corporate job-cutting operations in the United States. In 2025 alone, the company eliminated approximately 48,000 operational positions, including 15,000 fewer seasonal positions, and ended daily operations at 93 facilities. It announced plans to eliminate up to another 30,000 jobs in 2026, alongside further facility closures and automation.

In April, O’Brien reached an agreement with UPS permitting up to 7,500 driver buyouts, offering $150,000 to eligible workers. The union proclaimed the agreement a victory because UPS had negotiated the severance arrangements with the apparatus.

TDU continues to back O’Brien through these cuts, preparing another sellout when the UPS contract expires in 2028.

At their convention, O’Brien claimed absurdly that “We must hold UPS accountable to all our members … We must be on the offense for the next two years.”

TDU organized workshops preparing for the 2028 UPS contract, continuing to promote the supposed achievements of the 2023 agreement even as the company carries out massive job destruction.

TDU has been indispensable to O’Brien’s rise and consolidation in office. It endorsed him in 2021, presenting a former official in James P. Hoffa’s administration as a champion of union democracy and militancy. The alliance enabled TDU figures to enter the upper echelons of the union apparatus, including positions on the International’s General Executive Board and other well-paid posts.

TDU’s continued support expresses hostility to the political independence of the working class and the struggle against capitalism, without which genuine union democracy is impossible. For decades, TDU had presented the direct election of international officers as its signature democratic achievement. Now in this year’s convention it defended a procedure that allowed fewer than 1,600 convention delegates to settle the election without a popular vote.

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Republican convention appearance, his rapprochement with Trump, his attacks on immigrants and the mounting layoffs at UPS.

The political outcome became especially stark at the Teamsters’ June 2026 international convention. O’Brien and Zuckerman were returned to office for another five-year term after opposition candidates failed to secure nominations from the required 5 percent of convention delegates.

As a result, 1.3 million Teamsters were denied even the right to vote on their international officers. TDU defended the nomination threshold that prevented the election and congratulated O’Brien on his return to office.

Seeking to justify TDU’s continued support, TDU co-chair Antonio Rosario declared in a June interview with *Jacobin*: “If you’re against Trump, I am personally 100 percent with you. But TDU is not for that.”

But far from separate issues, much of the pseudo-left is openly advocating for collaboration with Trump. New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America who has met three times already with Trump, urged Democrats to look for “a place of shared purpose” with the would-be dictator. Bernie Sanders, appearing on national television Sunday, argued that Democrats should avoid spending excessive time investigating the administration and raised the possibility of working with Trump on economic and healthcare legislation.

The midterms anticipate an enormous escalation of the class struggle. Workers confronting layoffs, attacks on wages and living standards, immigrant repression and war will increasingly collide with union officials whose interests are bound up with the corporations and the capitalist state.

A rebellion against the union bureaucracy will be a central component of this struggle. Workers must build independent rank-and-file committees, which are being organized internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to mobilize their collective power against the oligarchy and its drive toward dictatorship and war.

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