

UPS Workers: How to Win

JULY 24—A Teamsters strike against UPS would be the biggest strike against a single U.S. employer in history, at a time when the working class desperately needs to push back against the attacks of the ruling class. Since the pandemic, when the bosses and their government dealt devastating blows to living and working conditions, things have gotten worse for workers. Enforced sacrifice, speedup and inflation have already pushed other “essential” supply chain workers, in rail and West Coast longshore, to try



Laura Brett/Zuma

NYC, July 6: Workers want to fight back, must be politically prepared. O'Brien organizes pickets as practice for parade, not militant class battle, not to stop scabs.

to fight back—and they are not even the worst off among the American working class. Teamsters *must fight* against poverty wages, deadly conditions and the tier system—issues plaguing workers across the country in many industries. But *to win* they must have a strategy that suits the situation they face.

Decades of deindustrialization and the disastrous response to COVID have weakened the domestic economy and international standing of the U.S. and, along with the U.S.-provoked war in Ukraine, put increased pressure on the supply chain. As a result, the enormous social power of supply chain workers has grown even greater. It must be used to fight for their needs and to open a broader counteroffensive against the bosses. The Biden administration already banned the rail strike and is attempting to bribe the West Coast longshore workers to prevent any disruption. The ruling class will use whatever means necessary to stop the Teamsters from making their increasingly unstable position even worse. Workers will only get what they want by wresting it from the bosses, and so they must be prepared for a real confrontation. They need a leadership and a program to win!

No Illusions in the Bosses' State!

The enemy is not narrowly the “greed” of the UPS bosses, but the anti-worker political and economic interests of the whole capitalist class. This is a fundamental clash of class interests! O'Brien says he is ready to fight, but he is *not* preparing union members for the hard-fought battle that is needed and which will disrupt the supply chain. Especially with Biden seeking re-election, O'Brien has no desire to create

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a crisis that could imperil the campaign of the strikebreaker he calls the “most pro-union president in our lifetime.”

O’Brien can make tough speeches for cameras at practice pickets all he likes. But what these pickets reveal is that, if he doesn’t call the whole thing off at the eleventh hour, he plans to run the strike like a pushy PR campaign in the court of bourgeois public opinion, and morally shame the company into coughing up a few bucks. The practice pickets are designed to give a platform to the bosses’ politicians, like AOC, who crushed the rail strike in Congress. Workers don’t need to hear the speeches of these charlatans, they need to be *politically prepared* to wage the strike with class-struggle methods. Like the Trotskyists who built the Teamsters in the 1934 Minneapolis general strike, workers need to prepare to *shut down* the company by *stopping* the scabs the bosses are training and their cop escorts. Instead, O’Brien cowers before the bosses’ laws and wants a strike that is a peaceful, legal parade, one which won’t risk him jail time.

O’Brien presents the state as a neutral arbiter, rather than leading the union with the understanding that the state is a tool of capitalist class domination. He rose to power with the endorsement of the TDU union-suers, who readily drag the union into the bosses’ courts, inviting the class enemy into workers’ affairs. Last year, O’Brien himself invited federal mediation into the rail dispute, colluding with the White House to cook up a rotten deal, which railroaders rejected. When Biden moved to stop them from striking, O’Brien rolled over, doing nothing to fight back, and later covered for the White House with the absurd lie that the administration didn’t intervene. Now, he smugly assures workers that he’s asked the White House not to intervene in a UPS strike, as though he can politely request the enemy not bring their big guns to war.

Full-Time Work for All Who Want It!

O’Brien says he is fighting for the part-timers, and workers want to do that. Everyone, especially part-timers, needs *massive* raises, and the union *must* fight for that. But this won’t fix the problem. A raise will get eaten up by inflation and rising housing and health care costs, etc. Part-timers

will still be under the whip, and they still won’t get the hours they need. The company said they will get rid of the lower-tier 22.4 job category, which is good, but the union needs to fight to get rid of *all* the divisions in the workforce. The divisions make the workers weaker and the bosses stronger.

The pay differences between part/full-time, tiers, sub-contractors, personal vehicle drivers—these are all just ways for the bosses to make more money off lower-paid workers, drive down wages for everybody, and make workers feel like they have to fight each other for better positions. People shouldn’t have to work for a decade or more in dangerous slave-labor conditions, barely able to get enough hours, before they get a regular job. The existence of non-union labor at Amazon and FedEx is another club used by the UPS bosses against Teamsters, which is why the union must seek these workers’ solidarity and organization in this fight. **Organize the unorganized sub-contractors, personal vehicle drivers and all other industry workers! Equal pay and benefits at the highest level for equal work! Full-time work for everybody who wants it!**

In the U.S., the bosses always try to segregate black people into the lowest tiers of the workforce. They want to keep black people oppressed to divide workers along racial lines. This makes it easier for them to drive down wages for everybody and pit workers against each other. Black workers at UPS are concentrated in part-time inside jobs. The major expansion of part-time work in the 1970s and ’80s screwed over both black and white workers, and made it possible for UPS to make increasingly greater profits.

As long as the bosses are in charge, they will oppress black people and divide workers to benefit themselves. The bosses shouldn’t be allowed to decide who gets to work on what or when. **For union control of hiring and scheduling!** We need union-run training and upgrading programs and a massive increase in hiring that consciously makes sure black and other minority workers aren’t jobless or stuck in the worst jobs. Every worker works too hard, and there are too many people without jobs. **The work should be spread among all who want it with no loss in pay**, so white workers or anyone else with a better position now would benefit, too. The only people who should pay are the bosses.

O’Brien won’t fight for what is actually needed to fix the real problem. He respects the “right” of the bosses to make the decisions about how “their” company runs—the decisions that screw over the people who actually do the work. He celebrates the token measure of getting a paid holiday on MLK Day. Workers should get a lot more paid days off, but that alone does nothing to break down the racial disparity in working conditions. By refusing to put the fight against black oppression at the center of a strike, he undermines the mobilization of the lower sections of the workforce and maintains the divisions that could prove fatal to a strike. **Down with the bosses’ racist divide-and-rule! For full integration, on and off the job!**

For Union Control of Health and Safety!

Work at UPS is dangerous. The warehouses and trucks are overheated deathtraps that maim and poison workers.

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The bosses don't want to spend the money to fix anything. O'Brien acts like he won something because the company supposedly agreed to put air-conditioning in trucks. The reality is that they're only going to put A/C in *new* vehicles *next year*, and that alone is hardly enough to make sure workers are safe. *Enough suffering and sacrifice!* Workers know what's safe, and what they need. As long as the bosses get to decide what conditions are safe, workers will continue to get hurt and killed. Workers need to *shut down production* when *they* think conditions are unsafe. *For union control of health and safety!*

O'Brien thinks that it was right that he and the rest of the union bureaucracy forced workers to risk their health and safety to protect the bosses' supply chain during the COVID crisis, rather than fighting against the bosses for what *workers* needed. He regularly talks about the devastating sacrifice workers made to keep the bosses' profits rolling and their system intact. UPS workers had to work crazy overtime, often in violation of the contract, to deliver the backbreaking increase in packages to a population locked up in their homes. Many were denied PPE and crammed into poorly ventilated facilities or were stuck wearing masks in the back of oppressively hot trucks. O'Brien's only gripe is that now the bill is due, so workers should get a bit of cash. *They should get a lot of cash!* But it's not like workers agreed to give the bosses a line of credit with their lives as collateral.

No! It was a criminal betrayal—utter class treason—when the entire labor officialdom led workers to death and poverty to prop up the crumbling capitalist system at a time when it was obvious that the bosses' system couldn't meet the needs of workers and the oppressed. Labor mis-

leaders carried out the bosses' blackmail in the working class, extracted sacrifice and givebacks, accepted mass layoffs and suppressed resistance. They are directly responsible for the horrible situation workers are in today. Workers need a leadership that will not literally lead them to slaughter.

O'Brien did not take a stand for the Teamsters during the pandemic, when workers were dying to keep the supply chain moving in the name of the "national interest." So how is he going to stand up to the entire establishment—the bosses, the media, the government—when the Teamsters *themselves* are crippling the supply chain? The pressure from the bosses to bow to the "national interest" will be as intense, if not more.

Fight for Socialist Leadership!

The question posed is not simply if the shipping giant will "pay up" for the sacrifice workers made to bring the bosses record profits, but if an opening shot will be fired in struggle against the current ruling-class offensive. The events to come will determine far more than the UPS contract. They will affect the balance of force between the workers and their capitalist masters in the coming period of increasing instability and uncertainty.

The working class requires a leadership that can adequately prepare the battles to come. To chart a course forward, that leadership must understand the forces at play, the irreconcilability of the workers' and bosses' class interests, the role of the capitalist state and—most importantly—the necessity of the struggle for workers power. It is imperative that workers fight back against the present attacks and build a leadership that will not cede ground to the bosses.

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The immediate task for socialists and union militants is to prepare the strike: build the union's strength, educate workers in the principles of the class struggle, reinforce class unity and fight for strike committees. Building the strike doesn't mean helping O'Brien. It means building the Teamsters *in spite* of O'Brien and his clique. Crucial to preparing the strike is exposing to workers how and why the current leadership is undermining in every way the preparation of the imminent fight. But every so-called socialist group in this country lines up behind O'Brien, either through open cheerleading or tepid criticism, which only sows illusions in his losing strategy.

Left Voice claims that because "expectations [are] raised... O'Brien will not be able to easily backtrack, even if he wanted to." They call to "increase the involvement of rank-and-file UPS workers" and "develop democratic shop-floor organizations" as part of strike preparations. But Left Voice's purpose for these organizations is not to expose O'Brien's strategy as an obstacle to winning the strike, but rather to give it a more democratic veneer. They draw no line against O'Brien's dead-end approach. In fact, they softball his collaboration with the bosses' government, stating: "The Teamsters leadership's friendly relationship with the Democrats doesn't guarantee that the government will be on our side." No, the O'Brien bureaucracy's "friendly relationship" all but guarantees that it will buckle when commanded by the White House. All of Left Voice's actions build illusions that a pro-capitalist leadership only needs to be pressured to fight in the interests of workers.

Socialist Alternative has a similar purpose for pressuring O'Brien, only one step removed. Their preferred vehicle is the TDU, which they state has "an especially important role to play in holding O'Brien's feet to the fire," but only if the TDU itself is sufficiently pressured from below. It is absurd to present the TDU as an alternate pole to the

O'Brien leadership, when the TDU played a central role in his election and, according to SAlt, "has unfortunately taken a completely uncritical approach to O'Brien."

Pressuring the trade-union bureaucracy to be more militant is not a solution because their betrayals are not caused just by lack of militancy. Their methods and tactics *flow from* their allegiance to the capitalist system. The task of socialists is to fight against all elements in the trade-union bureaucracy. Left Voice and Socialist Alternative do not counterpose an alternative leadership of the unions; they lend these pro-capitalist traitors their authority.

A Program for UPS Workers to Win:

- **No illusions in the bosses' state! Shut down the company! Stop the scabs!**
- **Massive raises that outstrip inflation for all!**
- **Full-time work for all who want it! Organize the unorganized! Equal pay for equal work!**
- **For union control of hiring and scheduling! Spread the work around with no loss in pay!**
- **Down with the bosses' racist divide-and-rule! For full integration, on and off the job!**
- **For union control of health and safety! Shut down operations when conditions are unsafe!**
- **Stop the bureaucrats' betrayals! For a militant class-struggle caucus based on a program to win!**
- **For a multiracial workers party that fights for a workers government!**

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