

Labor Can Turn the Country Around!

UPS, ILWU: Vote No!

Everyone can see that there's a crisis and that conditions in the U.S. are only worsening, from housing to health care. Pensions are basically nonexistent and working people have astronomical debt. The working class is discontented but strikes to try to improve their immiserated conditions have not managed to fundamentally change anything for the working class. The country is heavily divided over which capitalist ruler should screw them, Biden or Trump. Both choices are repugnant to many workers. The Democrats' main selling point is that Biden is not Trump. Biden is desperate to keep everything from falling apart before the elections. The last thing that "the most pro-union president" wants is a major union battle with the ILWU or Teamsters, which would cause a crisis. Crushing it would not bode well for Biden's poll numbers. On the other side Trump is no better. Some workers sympathetic to striking think the way to stick it to Biden and the Establishment is to vote for Trump. But with all his anti-Establishment rhetoric and appeals to the working class, Trump's loyalty lies with the bosses in charge of this country.

So what is needed? Clearly the politicians don't have the answers and are only gearing up to make things worse. The real battle is not "democracy" vs. "autocracy" or Biden vs. Trump, but workers vs. the Establishment! The way to change things is for labor to be an independent force that fights for itself. This could not only provide pay raises but it could change the total trajectory of this country. The purpose of the deals being dangled in the face of the workers is to prevent this. UPS, ILWU workers, vote "no"!

With economic crisis and a presidential election on the horizon, the bosses are trying to corral the workers move-

ment (especially supply chain workers) into submission, either with a carrot in the case of these contracts, or with the stick, as with the crushing of the rail workers last year. These strategic workforces could cause the most trouble for the government. This is what lies behind the bribe of substantial pay raises being offered to the Teamsters and ILWU. The bureaucrats argue that the deals are a victory, but in actuality accepting these deals means that the labor movement surrenders! These offers are not a show of the strength of the union, they are a sign of the weakness of the enemy. Biden is very unpopular and is desperately trying to buy peace in the lead-up to the elections. Instead of taking advantage of this opportunity, getting the most concessions, and changing the balance of forces for the class as a whole, the bureaucrats insist that these deals are the best that can be done. At bottom the bureaucracy is pushing these contracts because of their strategy to not challenge Biden or the capitalist order.

On the one hand the bureaucrats face pressure from their ranks to fight for improvements. On the other, their strategy dictates sacrifice in support of the Democrats and the capitalists. They obscure the fact that the situation at hand is a fundamental clash of class interests in an increasingly unstable period and that ultimately the only solution to workers' immiseration is the defeat of the bosses and their government. The bureaucracy disarms workers with illusions of amicable settlements and deludes them with the idea that backing the bosses' representatives in the Democratic Party is the way forward. The question posed is who really calls the shots in this country, the workers or the government? To fire an opening shot of a counter-offensive by labor will require breaking with the union

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tops' class-collaborationist strategy.

The government and bosses argue that giving supply chain workers what they need would cause a crisis. However, this is proof that irrational capitalist class rule cannot serve the workers but must be swept away, not accommodated. There is no doubt that a serious struggle by the ILWU and Teamsters would face an onslaught of blackmail for disrupting the supply chain. But this is no proof that workers have an interest in sacrificing to keep the bosses' profits rolling. It is proof that the political treachery of the union leaders disarms the workers and forces them onto their knees before the bosses' and the government's blackmail.

The most recent example of "national unity" blackmail was during the Covid-19 pandemic, when union leaders sacrificed the interests of the workers to keep the government and the supply chain up and running in the name of "saving lives," rather than fighting against the bosses to ensure the workers' health and safety. Their betrayals then led directly to the horrible conditions now. In longshore and UPS these same misleaders are again sacrificing the interests of the working class in this contract battle, in order to maintain the stability of the capitalist status quo.

For Class-Struggle Leadership of the Unions!

Today's union battles must be guided by a totally new political program and socialist leadership independent of and opposed to capitalist politicians—a leadership that understands that the capitalists must be defeated, not conciliated. To win, workers must advance towards fulfillment of their class interests—i.e., the right to a decent living, a safe work environment, a shorter workweek, etc.—at the expense of the capitalists, whose program is cheap labor, underinvestment in infrastructure and safety equipment, massive overtime, etc. The moment for labor to do this is so ripe that it's rotten. The real thing about these deals is not if the workers should get \$21/hour or \$25/hour (they should get more!), or if part-time workers do or don't get the short end of the stick (they do!). The real question is if labor will use its power to its own advantage and to the advantage of every worker in this country, or else let the criminals in the government get some breathing room, allowing the capitalists to regroup, shore up their position, crush the unions, and make sure things continue to go to hell.

Workers have everything to gain from rejecting these deals and fighting back right now. What better way to get the most concessions on and off the job than putting a weakened enemy on its knees? If you don't give us better wages, affordable health care and decent housing we'll make it hell for you! Every worker will benefit from this, especially black workers. Biden is desperate to get the votes of black workers in order to have a better chance of winning in 2024. But as black people know Biden has done absolutely nothing for them, which is why the Democrats are worried about losing their votes. Black people, allied with the whole working class, have the most to gain from rejecting these deals which are meant only to prop

up decrepit politicians. Teamster and ILWU tops brag that their workers can now make up to and over 100k due to these contracts, but this would not change the fact that a black worker would continue to go back to his segregated, crime-infested neighborhood, have to take his children to crumbling schools, and still be at the bottom of his workforce and society. In pushing to accept these bribes, the union leaders are doubling down on the already horrible conditions of black life in this country and accepting degraded conditions for all workers.

What is needed to really make labor a force to be reckoned with and come out on top is a united front of the ILWU, Teamsters, ALU, UAW, Hollywood workers and all other unions negotiating and striking to take on the bosses of this country together. In order to wage an offensive that wins, the unions must be run according to a totally different political strategy—one that is independent from capitalist politicians and in the interests of the working class—and fight to advance the position of labor, from the day-to-day struggles right now, all the way to a workers government.

While fake socialist organizations—from Left Voice and SAlt/Workers Strike Back to the Internationalist Group (IG)—are campaigning for a "no" vote on the contract, their motivation is that it is insufficient to meet the needs of the workers given the massive profits that UPS has made. This outlook is fundamentally the same as the O'Brien bureaucracy: to negotiate the best deal possible in the framework of what is acceptable to the capitalist bosses. The bureaucracy's betrayals are not caused simply by a lack of militancy to get the bosses to "pay up" for the "sacrifices" workers made. The job of Marxists is to show how the struggle facing the working class is political in nature, i.e., it requires a fight against the bureaucracy's defense of capitalism.

These fake socialist groups both tail the bureaucracy and talk about the need to build an independent workers party. Groups like Left Voice argue that "neither Democrats nor Republicans are on the side of the working class," but cover up that O'Brien's leadership and the entire union bureaucracy are the vital link of the unions to the Democratic Party and are actively undermining the struggle before it has even begun. Workers must break with the reformist program of the bureaucracy to advance the struggles of the working class and oppressed. The task of fighting for class-struggle leadership in explicit opposition to the pro-capitalist strategy of the union bureaucracy is what Left Voice, SAlt and the Internationalist Group reject.

In order to wage a winning offensive with a united front of labor right now, we put forward the following points and encourage union militants to fight for:

Wage and pension raises pegged to inflation! For a shorter workweek with no loss in pay!

Down with all tiers! Full ILWU benefits for all workers in the United States!

Build a Workers Party, independent of the Democrats, Republicans and Greens, fighting for a government that serves the workers! ■