

Republican Senator Marco Rubio endorses unionization drive at Alabama Amazon warehouse

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On Friday, the campaign to unionize approximately 5,800 warehouse workers at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, which is being heavily promoted by the Democratic Party and its media affiliates nationwide, secured what might appear to be an unlikely ally: Republican senator and former presidential candidate Marco Rubio.

Bessemer Amazon workers are currently voting whether to accept representation by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). Voting began on February 8 and workers have until March 29 to mail in their ballots.

In a column published in *USA Today*, Rubio announced that he “stands with” with the RWDSU unionization drive. Rubio wrote that “too often, the right to form a union has been, in practice, a requirement that business owners allow left-wing social organizers to take over their workplaces.” However, the career anti-communist from Florida reassured his readers: “That’s not what’s going on here.”

While Rubio acknowledged that he is generally against “adversarial” relationships between employers and employees, he provided a right-wing, nationalist justification for supporting the unionization drive in the case of Amazon.

Amazon should be punished, he wrote, for allegedly “bowing” to China. Rubio went on to denounce Amazon for endorsing “woke” culture, for refusing to publish or distribute certain right-wing tracts, and for putting its own corporate interests ahead of what Rubio perceives as America’s national interests. A company that behaves in this way, according to Rubio, cannot count on “conservatives” to rally to its defense against a unionization drive.

Rubio’s endorsement should give pause to anyone who

has been inclined to throw their uncritical support behind the RWDSU campaign in Alabama.

A one-time favorite of the so-called Tea Party movement and the National Rifle Association, and a veteran of local Florida politics long dominated by far-right anti-Castro exiles, there is nothing left-wing about Rubio’s political career. He has voiced his support for a long line of US invasions and proxy wars, and he has consistently solidarized himself with the drive by Christian fundamentalists to outlaw abortion.

Rubio sought the Republican nomination for president in 2016, losing to Trump, and he opposed Trump’s impeachment following the January 6, 2021, coup attempt.

RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum, clearly thrilled by Rubio’s column, celebrated with a same-day press release: “We welcome support from all quarters. Senator Rubio’s support demonstrates that the best way for working people to achieve dignity and respect in the workplace is through unionization. This should not be a partisan issue.”

The presentation of the unionization drive by the RWDSU as a “bipartisan issue” is extremely revealing. What this means is that, as far as the RWDSU is concerned, there will be no demands for social equality. There will be no challenge to the privileges and prerogatives of the billionaires. There will be no political demands for genuinely left-wing policies that challenge the wealth and power of billionaires like Amazon owner Jeff Bezos. There will be no mobilization of workers against the threat of violence from the far-right, as expressed in the attempted coup on January 6. Above all, there will be no challenge to *capitalism*, the existing social order, or the political status quo.

In fact, the RWDSU has not raised *any* concrete

demands on behalf of the Bessemer workers. On Sunday, the *World Socialist Web Site* sent an e-mail inquiry to the union, asking for a list of the demands the RWDSU has told workers it will fight for if it wins the vote. Chelsea Connor, RWDSU director of communications, responded, “That would be during contract negotiations, not during the union campaign.”

There is no shortage of demands that could and should be raised. Workers want to abolish the oppressive rate system, substantially improve their wages, protect themselves against COVID-19 and unsafe working conditions, and end the surveillance regime that records and logs every second of a worker’s day.

As opposition among Amazon workers finds more and more direct and conscious political expression, it will, in fact, bring forward immediate demands on questions of wages and workplace safety—and it will also necessarily raise challenges across broader social and political questions.

Amazon is a company, after all, that reported a record-setting haul of \$21.3 billion in 2020 profits, amid a rise in the stock price that added \$70 billion to the personal fortune of Bezos and sent the company’s market capitalization soaring to \$1.4 trillion.

With those profits, the company could have given each and every one of its 1.3 million workers worldwide a \$16,000 raise and still have had plenty of cash to spare.

Amazon workers in the US will necessarily turn outwards to other Amazon and logistics workers around the world, who face a struggle against the same international conglomerate, as well as towards a common struggle with teachers, autoworkers, and other sections of the working class to demand that workers’ health and safety be prioritized over corporate profits.

The fact that the RWDSU has raised no demands only demonstrates that it cannot and will not serve as a vehicle for articulating the massive opposition of Amazon workers. Instead, the unionization campaign has been a top-down operation, supported by Biden and the Democrats and sections of the Republican Party like Rubio. That is because they hope the unions can serve as a labor police force to suppress working-class militancy and the anti-capitalist and socialist sentiments that are growing among workers and young people.

With each passing day, it is becoming more and more clear that the full-throated endorsements of the Bessemer unionization campaign coming from sections of the political establishment are not a reflection of the growing opposition in the working class to capitalism, but of an

effort to suppress that opposition.

This basic function of the unions has been borne out by the whole experience of the global pandemic, during which the unions failed to call any significant strike actions even as 2.7 million people died, including 550,000 in the US. The RWDSU and its parent union, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), kept workers on the job when they were literally dying. This included three RWDSU workers at a Tyson poultry plant in Camilla, Georgia, last April.

While Amazon workers in the US are not unionized, their co-workers in Europe, many of whom are in unions, fared little better during the pandemic. Meanwhile, the teachers’ unions in particular are now promoting the murderous lie of a “safe reopening” of schools, browbeating teachers who insist on the scientific fact that conditions remain unsafe.

Whatever the outcome of the vote on unionization, Amazon workers will be confronted with a struggle—either against management directly or against management and its toadies in the union bureaucracy together. Amazon workers in Bessemer and other facilities will have to follow the example of the co-workers at Amazon’s BWI2 facility in Baltimore, Maryland, who have formed a rank-and-file committee, controlled by workers themselves and independent of the Democrats, Republicans, and unions. Such committees, which have been launched by educators in Alabama, Michigan, California and other states, along with autoworkers in several midwestern states, will be the primary vehicle for articulating and fighting for workers’ demands, preventing their struggles from being hijacked, and coordinating the struggles of Amazon and other workers throughout the United States and around the globe.



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