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California Amazon strikers, allies blockade warehouse

By Steve Gillis
 Norwood, Massachusetts

With military-like tactics and discipline, over 300 Teamsters and their supporters converged in the predawn darkness on a sprawling Amazon warehouse (DCB4) and truck barn in the Boston suburb of Norwood on July 8. At exactly 4 a.m., contingents of workers moved out of the shadows of wooded side streets and, with bullhorns blaring, blocked off multiple gates with moving pickets.

Picketing was led by two striking Amazon delivery drivers — Cecilia Porter and Brandi Diaz — who had flown in from Palmdale, California. The action brought out nearly 100 supporters, organized in text chats without public announcement by young workers, whose movement blossomed last summer from the 64-day strike and 24-hour occupation of the unionized Starbucks at Boston University.

Commanding the operation were Paul Weiskel, with the Teamsters Local 25 Futures Committee and director of Amazon organizing, and Raphael McKnight of Local 25's Movie Division. The Futures Committee "provides a platform for young workers to mobilize themselves and cultivate leaders who know what it truly means to be a Teamster." (teamsterslocal25.org)

With forces soon strengthened by uniformed United Parcel Service (UPS) drivers from a barn across the street, and as surprised and vastly outnumbered cops began scrambling to the scene, the picketers immediately stopped multiple Amazon big rigs from delivering to the facility!

From then until 8 a.m., not one vehicle could move in or out. This was during a Saturday morning when Amazon vehicles typically create traffic jams throughout the residential neighborhood! The striking drivers vowed to keep returning until an acceptable contract is won in the Palmdale warehouse.

Drivers' strike makes history

In April, Diaz, Porter and their 82 co-workers at Battle Tested Strategies (BTS) in Palmdale became the first of an estimated 275,000 drivers who deliver Amazon packages in the U.S. to unionize, in this case with Teamsters Local 396 in Los Angeles.

Diaz spotlighted their motivation to organize and strike: "Amazon is a wealthy corporation, but the workers who make it possible are all living paycheck-to-paycheck. I'm a single mother and am barely making ends meet for my three kids on Amazon's low wages. We deserve better from Amazon. Our unfair labor practice strike will continue until Amazon stops violating the law and starts taking responsibility for the workers who deliver its packages."

Instead of bargaining with the workers, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos — on and off the top of lists of the world's wealthiest capitalists — canceled the contract with BTS. The company is one of 3,000 sub-contracted "Delivery Service Partners" which



Starbucks Workers United solidarity delegation leads chants at daybreak in Norwood, Massachusetts, July 8, 2023.

WW PHOTO: STEVE GILLIS

organize drivers under the corporate legal fiction naming them "independent contractors." This exploitative maneuver has thus far been allowed by U.S. courts and utilized by Uber, Lyft, Doordash and a myriad of app-based, billionaire-producing companies to avoid all responsibilities as an employer.

Amazon effectively fired all the drivers who had already ratified a first-ever union contract with BTS. The firings were only one of Amazon's dozens of unfair labor practices in Palmdale. The company has committed hundreds of blatant violations of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act in its war against unions, most notably in Staten Island and Albany, New York and Bessemer, Alabama.

"These Amazon workers organized a union for fair pay and safe jobs, but Amazon illegally refused to recognize their union or bargain with them," said Teamsters Local 396 Secretary-Treasurer Victor Mineros. "The support from communities around these warehouses and other workers in this industry has been tremendous. We are going to hold this corporate criminal accountable for how it treats the workers who wear its uniforms and deliver its packages." (Teamsters.org)

Since these trailblazing drivers hit the bricks in Palmdale on June 24, the Teamsters union has sent militant striker flying squadrons to shut down Amazon warehouses in California, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Dress rehearsals for major looming class battles

Sean O'Brien was launched into the presidency in March 2022 by 1.4 million rank-and-file workers and the Teamsters for a Democratic Union caucus, who were angry at the former leadership's contract concessions at UPS and corporate pandemic abuses throughout Teamster industries. O'Brien has declared daily the union's intentions to overturn UPS's exploitative labor agreement while moving to organize

Amazon by militant actions — without reliance on impotent National Labor Relations Board processes.

Increasingly worried bourgeois media headlines warn of supply chain disaster if the Teamsters union makes good on its promise to take their 340,000 members out on strike at UPS on Aug. 1 when the current contract expires. Already the rank and file's 97% strike vote momentum has defeated UPS's onerous two-tier wage scale and tentatively won dozens of "non-economic" victories. These include air-conditioned vehicles, language to ensure drivers are paid correctly and on time, and grievance process improvements during ongoing contract negotiations.

But after one meeting on "economic issues," the union announced that the UPS offer was unacceptable, and the company's CEO Carol B. Tome and her posse of lawyers reportedly walked out. UPS pulled in a record \$100 billion in revenue in 2022, which in turn delivered record profits for its Wall Street shareholders.

In subsequent days, tens of thousands of UPS workers across the country have mobilized practice pickets at UPS barns, training in tactical techniques, media and community relations, and internal political education and solidarity. Concurrent mobilizations have been happening nationwide among supporter organizations, many of them powered by increasing numbers of working-class and socialist-minded youth.

What do we want? More class-conscious labor and community solidarity!

This growing mobilization of labor and community forces was reflected in today's predawn offensive at Amazon warehouse DCB4 by spirited contingents of Starbucks baristas, local university student unionists, hotel and restaurant workers, activists from the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and tech workers who are organizing. Also present were members of the Democratic Socialists of America, the Young Communist League, the Party for Socialism and Liberation, and the Independent Socialist Group.

Workers World Party cadre assisted with security, brought and set up sound systems and helped lead rousing non-stop chanting and music at the main gate.

The pandemic and war-era recession is developing in fits of bank insolvencies, high-tech layoffs, skyrocketing interest rates and inflation and contradictory "labor shortages" in essential industries. Ruling class commentators now openly fear this will turn into capitalist economic crises of world-historic proportions. The practice run in Norwood is exactly what is needed on a massive, nationwide scale to combat and ultimately overthrow the owners of global capitalist production.

Steve Gillis is a 37-year member and an elected leader of the Boston School Bus Drivers Union, United Steelworkers Local 8751, now working for the members and retired from driving.

Jill Scott sings truth about U.S. racism

By Monica Moorehead

"Oh, say, can you see, by the blood in the streets, that this place doesn't smile on you, colored child. Whose blood built this place with sweat and their hands. But you'll die in this place and your memory erased. Oh say, does this truth hold any weight? This is not the land of the free but the home of the slave."

These lyrics were sung to the melody of the "Star-Spangled Banner" (the U.S. national anthem) by the brilliant African American singer, Jill Scott, at the Essence Festival July 2 in New Orleans. The annual music festival, which takes place over the Fourth of July weekend, is one of the largest African American music events in the U.S. This year's Festival attracted 500,000 people.

Scott's anti-racist, anti-patriotic, powerful rendition is reminiscent of the year-long public protest that Colin Kaepernick, the former National Football League

quarterback, conducted throughout the 2016 football season by taking a knee during the playing of the anthem to protest racial injustice.

The police murders of Philando Castile in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area and Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, during the summer of 2016 happened just months before Kaepernick sparked this historic protest movement amongst athletes from all sports, professional and amateur.

During this same period of protests, Francis Scott Key, who wrote the text of the anthem in 1814, was exposed for being a slaveowner and for writing pro-slavery lyrics for the third verse of the anthem.

Jill Scott's rendition drew the ire of right-wing news pundits, with media like Fox News and the New York Post — along with right-wing politicians — accusing her of "shaming" and "trashing" the national anthem with her "alleged" racial injustice lyrics. They accused her of being hypocritical because of her financial success as an entertainer.

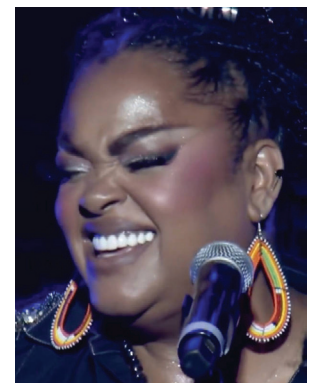
But many praised her rendition for telling the truth about

the legacy of slavery that is alive and well throughout every aspect of today's society.

If she did not sing this version of the anthem at such a huge public event, it might have gone unnoticed, but she stated that she sang the anthem at previous lesser known events, having written these lyrics over 30 years ago in her hometown of Philadelphia before she burst onto the music scene.

Jill Scott's bold action must be defended because her lyrics express the class truth of the second-class, institutionalized status that still exists for Black people in the U.S. that can never be denied or silenced.

Go to [youtube.com/watch?v=B1tyFi-BTWo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1tyFi-BTWo) to see Scott's performance. □



Jill Scott

Are nuclear weapons next after cluster bombs?

So desperate is President Joe Biden to expand the U.S./NATO war against Russia being carried out in Ukraine, that on July 7 he announced plans to send in \$800 million worth of cluster bombs. Over 120 countries, including many U.S. allies, have signed agreements to prohibit the production or use of cluster munitions.

Cluster munitions destroy multiple targets at once by releasing explosive “bomblets” over considerable distances from where the primary bomb deployed. Cluster bombs are controversial because of their documented failure — dud rate — of unexploded bomblets, which linger on the ground for decades, indiscriminately detonating when stepped on. Civilians, particularly children, have been the primary victims.

Early in the war, the Biden administration alleged that Russia was using cluster bombs and claimed this would be a “war crime” if true. Now Biden is trying to counter critics by claiming that U.S. cluster bombs, with an alleged dud rate of 2.5%, have a lower dud rate than Russia’s bombs. Biden is ignoring U.S. laws prohibiting the production, use or transfer of cluster munitions with a dud rate greater than 1%.

However, the New York Times reported that “The Pentagon’s statements indicate that the cluster munitions that will be sent to Ukraine contain older grenades known to have a failure rate of 14% or more.” (July 9) By his own admission, Biden should be the one charged with war crimes.

The U.S. and Israel top the list of countries using cluster bombs with the most deadly impact on civilian populations. The U.S. set records for using cluster bombs in Vietnam, Cambodia,

Afghanistan and Iraq. At the height of the Vietnam War, the U.S. dropped 80 million cluster bombs in neighboring Laos. According to Al Jazeera, 50 years later lives continue to be lost as a result. (Nov. 21, 2018)

In 2006, Israel rained 4 million cluster bombs on southern Lebanon, targeting Palestinians living in exile and Lebanese militants.

U.S. promises even more weapons

CNN reported that cluster munitions are compatible with the U.S.-provided 155mm howitzers — the key piece of artillery used by Ukrainian forces. (June 7)

Biden claims the U.S. needs to send these weapons, known for killing and maiming civilians, because “the Ukrainians are running out of ammunition.”

From February 2022 through early May 2023, the U.S. sent Ukraine aid valued at \$76.8 billion, mostly in military weapons. There is not much the U.S. hasn’t sent to Ukraine when it comes to military supplies and support — anything to expand the war against Russia.

The Biden administration has provided or agreed to provide Ukraine with Abrams battle tanks, anti-aircraft missiles, coastal defense ships, advanced surveillance, radar systems and more, according to a long list provided by the U.S. Department of Defense, published by the Council on Foreign Relations. (May 19)

On June 13, the Wall Street Journal reported the U.S. will be sending depleted uranium munitions to Ukraine, despite ample evidence of the devastating impact of DU on military and civilian populations.

In their drive to win this war against

Russia at any cost, members of the Biden administration have even suggested the use of “limited” nuclear weapons in Ukraine, even making ungrounded claims that Russia will do this first.

Compared to other countries receiving U.S. military aid in recent years, the scale of this aid to Ukraine is extraordinary, yet Ukraine continues to lose ground militarily. The Kiev regime keeps demanding more advanced equipment, including fighter aircraft, which would escalate the war and pull NATO allies more directly into combat.

Biden’s national security adviser Jake Sullivan says that the cluster munitions are a “bridge of supplies” while the U.S. works to increase production of other types of artillery to send to Ukraine. But the U.S. has thrown nearly every type of weapon in its arsenal into Ukraine with no significant gain, just more massive destruction, and mounting death tolls for soldiers and civilians.

Biden’s decision was announced ahead of a NATO summit in Lithuania July 11-12, where it is anticipated that Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky will push for membership in NATO, thus opening the door to direct NATO intervention and escalation of the war.

Since the U.S. war in Korea ended in 1953, beginning a 70-year stalemate, the U.S. has failed to “win” a single war it has engaged in from Vietnam to Afghanistan, despite the massive loss of lives and damage to infrastructures. Ukrainian workers need to know that they have nothing to gain from this war. Intervention by the U.S. in any war has always been about maximizing the blood-soaked profits for the weapons manufacturers and expanding U.S. imperialism’s empire. □

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Workers World
121 W. 27th St., Suite 404
New York, NY 10001
Phone: 212.627.2994
E-mail: wwp@workers.org
Web: www.workers.org



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Editors: John Catalinotto, Martha Grevatt, Deirdre Griswold, Monica Moorehead, Betsey Piette

Web Editors: ABear, Harvey Markowitz, Janet Mayes

Tear Down the Walls! Editors: Mirinda Crissman, Ted Kelly

Production & Design Editors: Gery Armsby, Sasha Mazumder

Copyediting and Proofreading: Paddy Colligan, Steve Gillis and K. James

Contributing Editors: G. Dunkel, K. Durkin, Sara Flounders, Otis Grotewohl, Gloria Rubac

Mundo Obrero: Deborah Rodriguez, Carlos Vargas

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Join us in the fight for socialism!

Workers World Party is a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party inside the belly of the imperialist beast. We are a multinational, multigenerational and multigendered organization that not only aims to abolish capitalism, but to build a socialist society because it’s the only way forward!

Capitalism and imperialism threaten the peoples of the world and the planet itself in the neverending quest for ever-greater profits.

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repression, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny, LGBTQ2S+ oppression and mistreatment of people with disabilities. It means joblessness, increasing homelessness and impoverishment and lack of hope for the future. No social problems can be solved under capitalism.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world, yet no one has a guaranteed right to shelter, food, water, health care, education or anything else — unless they can pay for it. Wages are lower than ever, and youth are saddled with seemingly insurmountable student debt, if they even make it to college. Black, Brown and Indigenous youth and trans people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

The ruthless ruling class today seeks to wipe out decades of gains and benefits won by hard-fought struggles by people’s movements. The super-rich and their political representatives have intensified their attacks on the multinational, multigender and multigenerational working class. It is time to point the blame at — and challenge — the capitalist system.

WWP fights for socialism because the working class produces all wealth in society, and this wealth should remain in their hands, not be stolen in the form of capitalist profits. The wealth workers create should be socially owned and its distribution planned to satisfy and guarantee basic human needs.

Since 1959, Workers World Party has been out in the streets defending the workers and oppressed here and worldwide. If you’re interested in Marxism, socialism and

fighting for a socialist future, please contact a WWP branch near you. □

If you are interested in joining Workers World Party contact: 212.627.2994

National Office
121 W. 27th St., Suite 404
New York, NY 10001
212.627.2994
wwp@workers.org

Atlanta
PO Box 18123
Atlanta, GA 30316
404.627.0185
atlanta@workers.org

Bay Area
P.O. Box 22947
Oakland, CA 94609
510.394.2207
bayarea@workers.org

Boston
284 Amory St.
Boston, MA 02130
617.522.6626
boston@workers.org

Buffalo, N.Y.
335 Richmond Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14222
716.883.2534
buffalo@workers.org

Central Gulf Coast
(Alabama, Florida, Mississippi)
centralgulfcoast@workers.org

Cleveland
cleveland@workers.org

Durham, N.C.
919.322.9970
durham@workers.org

Houston
P.O. Box 3454
Houston, TX 77253-3454
713.503.2633
houston@workers.org

Minnesota
minnesota@workers.org

Philadelphia
P.O. Box 34249
Philadelphia, PA 19101
610.931.2615
phila@workers.org

Portland, Ore.
portland@workers.org

Salt Lake City
801.750.0248
slc@workers.org

San Antonio
sanantonio@workers.org

Seattle
seattle@workers.org

West Virginia
WestVirginia@workers.org