

Friedman Replies to Sernatinger

written by Sam Friedman | August 22, 2026



The following is a response by Samuel R. Friedman, to Andrew Sernatinger's review of Friedman's Teamster Rank and File.

To the best of my recollection, I have never before written to respond to a review of one of my books. Although Andrew Sernatinger's review of my book *Teamster Rank and File* in *New Politics* 81 (Summer 2026) is generally extremely favorable, its response to my Introduction to the New Edition not only ignores (and misinterprets) what I say about TDU now but includes claims about what I did that are factually incorrect—as any careful reviewer should have understood. Of course, as an author who wrote a book that a reader misunderstood, I apologize to readers of the book and of Sernatinger's review, and to Andrew himself, for any confusion I have caused.

First to the clear error in what he wrote: After discussing my inclusion of words by Ken Paff, Sernatinger says that,

"He does not engage even one other Teamster regarding TDU or O'Brien; not Tim Sylvester, Tom Leedham, or Bill Zimmerman, longtime stalwarts of TDU who were cast out when they voiced their consciences about the disaster of the O'Brien alliance; not Dan La Botz or Mel Packer, or any of the older International Socialists (IS) cadres who founded TDU and are still alive today; not Richard Hooker Jr. or John Palmer who were leading the FEARLESS slate; not Joe Allen who has written extensively on the Teamsters."

In doing this, he ignores the fact that the "blurbs" that introduce the book include blurbs written by both Dan La Botz and Joe Allen. He also ignores the acknowledgements to the new introduction that reads:

Many people have helped me prepare the Introduction for the second edition of *Teamster Rank and File* (TRAF). These include **Joe Allen**, who also originally suggested that a second edition would be timely and useful; **Dan La Botz**, who has shared his experiences and writings with me and offered valuable suggestions about earlier drafts; **Ken Paff**, who offered insights and information based on his experience with TDU since its founding; and Brian McDougall, **Kevin Anderson**, David Camfeld, **Howie Hawkins**, **Tim G**, **Ian W. Tulloch**, and Jerzy Eisenberg-Guyot, who all offered critically important insights and suggestions as they reviewed drafts.

I have bolded the names of people who have been Teamsters. I did not describe their involvement in

great depth, but I got input from all of them, and Dan La Botz, in particular, interacted with me throughout the writing of this Introduction. Many of the people listed read near-final drafts and made suggestions. (I might also mention that, although this was not alluded to in the book, I attended several events that Teamsters Mobilize put on and interacted with members of this organization.)

As to the content of what I said about TDU now, Sernatinger and I actually agree on the state of this once-impressive organization. In spite of his claim that my text fails “to analyze the current role of TDU” and that it gives the “the first, last, and only word on TDU and the Teamsters to Ken Paff,” I carefully analyze the devolution of TDU since the Carey presidency of the IBT, including an analysis of the disaster of TDU’s support for Sean O’Brien.[1] My discussion of TDU’s role in the non-strike at UPS in 2023 is totally at odds with what Sernatinger claims:

Even though I had observed the ways in which TDU had become an electorally oriented reform movement over the years, and had in many ways become an ally of union officers and staff who were discontented with the Hoffa leadership and its extreme willingness to accommodate company interests, TDU’s actions in siding with O’Brien and opposing the “vote no” campaign surprised me. In some ways, I see it as parallel to what happened in 1914 when the Social Democratic Parties of the major European countries voted to support “their” countries during the First World War in that it showed the way in which the dialectical process of negation could flip workers’ organizations from one side of the class struggle to the other without it having been visible before a crisis occurred.

I would think that a claim that TDU had flipped to the other side of the class struggle shows that I have analyzed the current role of TDU (even if I may have gone too far in my rhetoric.) I might add that I describe a number of other ways in which TDU has acted undemocratically and has exerted effort to keep socialist politics out of its annual conferences. My list does not include some of those Sernatinger mentions since they happened after I had sent the final copy of the text to the publisher.

Sernatinger takes umbrage at my including quotations from my interactions with Ken Paff. I think he fails to understand what I did in doing so. As a preface, I want say that I followed the example of many great socialists, including Marx, Luxemburg, Lenin and many others, in presenting the views of highly-articulate holders of perspectives with which they disagreed before critiquing them. Somehow, Sernatinger’s fails to recognize that this is what I did with Paff. I let him describe and defend both TDU’s other actions and why it supported O’Brien. I then critiqued these views in ways that are far from giving him the last word. Here is what I said:

As I see it, and Paff might disagree, these are the responses of an honest and democratic business unionist—the kind of response that Alex Maheras (then the Secretary-Treasurer of Local 208) might have given me in 1974 after he took over leadership after the Trusteeship. It is not a socialist response in any way, nor even the response that a militant steward in Local 208 might have given in the preceding Blackmarr regime of the 1960s when wildcats were part of the workers’ toolkit. It is also not what is needed today, as I discuss in the following section of this Introduction

I want to emphasize what this means: Paff responded to my questions as an honest business unionist. This is a tragic fate for someone who was a proponent of socialism-from-below when he helped form TDU decades ago. A large part of my discussion of TDU focused on analyzing why a rank and file organization founded at the initiative of socialists of our tendency could have led to a business union-focused organization that would support someone like O’Brien and do its best to keep any hint of socialist politics out of its annual conferences. Unfortunately, Sernatinger missed this, and interpreted it by saying that “Friedman ultimately characterizes TDU as a longtime success. He leans on nostalgia for the IS as he dismisses the many controversies as merely unfortunate.” What is unfortunate is that he dismisses such analysis of how a socialist-inspired project devolved into anti-

democratic business unionism as nostalgia and as characterizing TDU as a long-term success.

Notes

[1] I might add that I cite works by Joe Allen and Dan La Botz several places in this Introduction, based in part on my conversations with them about how to provide support for my descriptions and analysis.