

Teamsters President Sean O'Brien Should Not Speak at the RNC

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written by Dan La Botz | July 10, 2024



A speaking engagement at the Republican National Convention by Teamster President Sean O'Brien, regardless of the message, only normalizes and makes the most anti-union party and President I've seen in my lifetime seem palatable. Teamster members and leaders have the right to demand an answer to the questions: What does the General President intend to say? What does he hope to achieve from such an appearance?

Does O'Brien intend to remind the anti-union delegates that labor unions exist to ensure that workers - regardless of their race, sex, gender, gender identity, or religion - equally enjoy the security and fairness that a written labor agreement provides? The Labor Movement from its inception has been about expansion of rights for all workers.

Is he going to state the obvious fact that unions' ability to achieve these goals is being stripped away by the current overzealous Supreme Court? The majority of these Justices have been appointed by the same Republicans who will be at this Convention. This Court just overturned the decades old Chevron decision, paving the way for corporate challenges to rules adopted by administrative agencies like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the National Labor Relations Board, the EPA and others responsible for protection of the environment and workers' safety and rights. That ruling will open the door for judges who have corporate backgrounds and biases to substitute their opinions for the expertise of these government agencies. It will allow employers to bring meritless but endless lawsuits, effectively tying up the agencies' efforts to prevent union-busting and the weakening of safety rules and environmental protections.

Is O'Brien going to confront Donald Trump and his Republican Party for continuing to support Right to Work legislation across the country? Republican Governors in red states have openly and publicly opposed the unionization drives at Volkswagen and Mercedes Benz, going as far as to threaten to withhold state subsidies if employees exercise their democratic and legally protected right to vote by secret ballot to form a union. During his term, then-President Trump abandoned the historic practice of appointing at least nominally qualified career or academic professionals to positions of authority, substituting these professionals with ideologically driven lawyers from corporate firms or corporate-sponsored think tanks and lobby groups. The decisions issued during Trump's term resulted in increased employer retaliation against thousands of union members and against Amazon workers attempting to form unions.

Donald Trump openly attacks immigrants as criminals, an attack on many hardworking and loyal American citizens whom we as the Teamsters Union are proud to represent. His party and his Supreme Court have struck down the rights women have had to control their own bodies and protect their own health and wellbeing. Trump and his party have endangered the physical and medical safety of the LGBTQ community by turning a blind eye to repressive state legislation. As Teamsters, we owe a continued commitment to these communities, especially to those who are our members.

Trump has supported the growth of armed rightwing forces that possess a radical racial ideology, including those that engaged in a violent insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6th. Trump calls these criminals "hostages" and "patriots." The IBT headquarters overlooks the Capitol building. No one who saw those armor-clad, weapon-wielding rioters would call them anything other than what they were: insurrectionists determined to stop the orderly and peaceful transfer of power to the legitimately elected President. Trump foments blame and hatred against Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Muslims, Americans, and immigrants, accusing them of being responsible for many problems both real and imagined. He recently stated that immigrants are stealing Black and Latino jobs. What the hell is that? All of this is directly contrary to the goals of the Labor Movement. It is no surprise that Trump echoes language used by Hitler in Mein Kampf. Nor should we forget that labor unions and their leaders were among the early targets for elimination by the Nazi regime.

What pro-worker accomplishments can O'Brien point to during Donald Trump's term? Trump could have supported the Butch Lewis Act and saved multi-employer pension plans. But he could not be bothered. Not a single Republican senator voted in favor of the bill passed by the Biden administration with the help of two newly elected Georgia senators and supported by the Teamsters Union but which Trump opposed and belittled. This one bill saved pensions for hundreds of thousands of workers.

Trump removed the US from the Paris Climate Accords and its protections. His reckless disregard for the climate has affected workers and communities everywhere. This resulted in the deaths of our members and other workers on the job due to the increasingly deadly heat waves hitting the US and the world. Putting a handful of air conditioners in a few UPS vehicles does not protect all drivers from 102-degree heat.

Donald Trump supports corporate efforts to automate our industries, including the use of robotics and AI. The consequence of this automation is currently eliminating Teamster jobs at UPS, Grocery, Freight, and Warehousing as well as many other industries across the United States.

Trump and his party support the privatization of public services and public education such as vouchers, charters, and the use of public monies for religious schools. What happened to the separation of church and state? This party actively supports the banning of books from schools and public libraries in red states.

Trump passed and still supports major tax cuts for billionaires and huge corporations. Those billionaires oppose unionization and want to dismantle the National Labor Relations Board.

These are not Democratic or Republican issues, or even union and non-union issues. They are issues that will determine the future of American workers - indeed, the well-being of the entire world's population. It is unconscionable for any Labor leader to lend an air of legitimacy to a candidate and a political party, neither of which can be said to have done, or can be expected to do, anything to improve the lives of the workers we are pledged to represent.

The Teamsters conducted a poll of which the majority of members chose not to support Donald Trump. Members should demand that President O'Brien not participate in the Republican Convention, nor allow himself to disgrace this Union by creating the false impression that Teamsters members support Trump and all he stands for. Remember the Mar-a-Lago "thumbs up" photo and the travesty in the IBT headquarters lobby? We have been used enough! If O'Brien is going to satisfy his ego, if he's going to pander and beg for the Republicans to abandon their anti-union policies, then the Teamsters' membership would be better served if O'Brien stayed home.