

New York Amazon workers deal setback to union drive

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Workers hoping to unionize a second Amazon facility in Staten Island came up short, according to election results.

Workers at an Amazon facility in New York have roundly voted against unionization—dealing a setback to a burgeoning organized labor

movement one month after a landmark win at a nearby warehouse.

Sixty-two percent of workers at the Staten Island facility opposed the union push, with 618 employees voting no and 380 in support, according to results released Monday by US officials.

The election at the LDJ5 warehouse followed on the heels of an upset April 1 win by the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) at the much larger JFK8 Staten Island company site—which established the first American union at the retail colossus.

Last month's win stood as one of the biggest recent victories by US organized labor, winning plaudits from President Joe Biden and other leading unions, some of which visited Staten Island ahead of the second vote.

But the ALU acknowledged its latest setback at Amazon—the second biggest private employer in the United States after Walmart.

"The count has finished. The election has concluded without the union being recognized," the ALU said on Twitter. "The organizing will continue at this facility and beyond. The fight has just begun."

Backers of the union drive said Amazon was well prepared for the latest vote, and had aggressively campaigned to quash momentum from the earlier victory.

Further complicating their efforts, union leaders were not as well known as at JFK8, where the ALU's president Christian Smalls had previously worked.

Smalls launched the drive after being fired in March 2020 for organizing a protest for personal protective equipment during New York's first

major COVID-19 outbreak.

"At the end of the day, this is a marathon not a sprint," Smalls told reporters. "We all know there are going to be wins and losses, we're going to fight another day."

More wins needed

On the other side of the fight, Amazon spokeswoman Kelly Nantel said the company was "glad that our team at LDJ5 were able to have their voices heard."

"We look forward to continuing to work directly together as we strive to make every day better for our employees."

Since its launch in the 1990s, Amazon has fiercely fought to remain union-free, seeking to maintain its direct line to workers and boosting pay and benefits during the pandemic when "essential workers" in logistics kept the economy going.

Eric Milner, an attorney representing the ALU, called Monday's result "disappointing" but said it reflected the effects of "illegal conduct" on Amazon's part in patterns of disciplining workers and otherwise working to "chill" union activity.

Analyzing the result, Patricia Campos-Medina, co-director of the Worker Institute at Cornell University, said Smalls' experience as an employee gave him "credibility" with workers—but that he had lacked time to build credibility at the second facility.

She said it will be pivotal for the union to "keep winning" to put pressure on Amazon to negotiate, drawing on backing from the Teamsters and other established unions.

"They already expressed willingness to support ALU, logistically and legally," Campos-Medina said.

"What now needs to happen is actually all these unions who were planning to organize Amazon, they actually now need to do it. It has to be a multifaceted organizing effort of the corporation, it cannot just be one by one."

For now, Amazon is challenging the ALU's April victory, saying representatives of the labor group intimidated workers and that US officials with the National Labor Relations Board were biased against the company.

A hearing on the Amazon complaints is set for May 23 in Phoenix.

The ALU has rejected the Amazon complaints as groundless, arguing the company is using stalling tactics to avoid negotiations on a contract.

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