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Workers at Target attacked by far-right

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Newsflash: The anti-LGBTQ+ bigots are anti-worker

The far right's agitation around corporate brands is not limited to boycotts and outlandish social media posts. They are harassing and threatening retail workers in person. When Target pulled back Pride merchandise in response to the far right's bullying tactics – likely emboldening these neo-fascists – it was in the aftermath of real disturbances that occurred in stores.

[The Washington Post describes](#) multiple incidents at one Target location in South Florida, where workers have been confronted by bigots calling them “groomers.” At this same location, a manager wearing a safety vest over a Pride shirt was told by a customer, “Oh, is that so I could shoot you easier?”

Part of a broad trend

Retail workers are no strangers to customer attacks, which rose during the

COVID-19 pandemic. UNI Global Union, an international service workers' union federation, released a [2022 report](#) with data from 20 countries showing a dramatic increase in abuse and physical violence against workers, including workers in the U.S. being shot to death for asking customers to wear masks. For example, in Decatur, Georgia, [cashier Laquitta Willis was murdered](#) by an irate customer over masking.

The recent anti-LGBTQ+ incidents in stores can be considered in relation to that trend. And the political link is not incidental. The same far right promoted conspiracies during the pandemic and opposed basic public health measures, ratcheting up tensions at a time when social solidarity was quite literally a matter of survival.

Anti-LGBTQ+ panic is anti-worker

With some 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills being rammed through state legislatures, the fascist shock troops on the ground – the ones causing trouble in stores, libraries, and other public places – are attempting to scare LGBTQ+ people back into the closet. We will not let them succeed, but their intentions should be clear.

It is coming from the top. The same politicians implementing austerity are promoting queer and trans panic. They are enemies of the working class, and their attacks on LGBTQ+ people are meant to divide workers.

All retail workers are endangered by this onslaught, regardless of gender and sexual orientation. Any worker can get harassed by a bigot. If a shooter decides to open fire in a store, it will not be only queer and trans people who die. All policy goals and outcomes aside, this fact alone should demonstrate the anti-worker nature of this astroturfed movement.



Target workers rally for hazard pay and PPE. Photo: Target Workers Unite!

The problem of pinkwashing

Target and other corporations are no friends of workers or LGBTQ+ people.

Target has used union-busting tactics as workers organized in recent years. The bosses have fought against the national rank-and-file effort, [Target Workers Unite!](#), which seeks to unionize stores.

Despite those efforts, last year, Target workers in Christiansburg, Virginia, got as far as [filing for a union election](#) with the National Labor Relations Board – a major achievement, especially considered in relation to the big organizing wave, including Amazon and Starbucks unions.

Early in the pandemic, Target workers forced the company to implement safety measures. Management tried to prevent employees from wearing masks. On May Day 2020, some 200 Target workers across the U.S. staged a sick-out, which likely

helped force the company's hand to implement \$2-an-hour hazard pay and improved protections. Target Workers Unite! was instrumental in organizing the sick-out.

In addition, radical LGBTQ+ activists have long sounded the alarm about handing Pride over to corporations, banks, police, municipalities, and the military. We have seen the dangers of this play out recently when Pride events were canceled in Tampa and other Florida cities after Ron DeSantis signed an anti-drag bill into law.

Revolutionary, anti-imperialist LGBTQ+ people have also called out the cynicism of imperialist governments and complicit NGOs when they use LGBTQ+ people, women, and other oppressed groups as props to justify war and sanctions.

Danger of right opportunists in progressive movement

Today, a section of people formerly on the left are now re-aligning with the neo-fascist right. Largely informal networks, these groupings have gone by various names, such as "patriotic socialists" and even "MAGA communists." Despite the titles they give themselves, these people are anti-communist, and share many characteristics with historical fascists, such as making vague diatribes against "elites." All the while, they tail behind the likes of Trump and DeSantis, whose policies are emphatically anti-worker.

These people obfuscate matters by asserting that because corporations have attempted to attract LGBTQ+ consumers with PR and merchandising, then the LGBTQ+ movement must itself be bourgeois.

The reality is that Pride started as a riot, led by working-class Black and Brown trans people. The struggle for basic rights, including for humane treatment during the AIDS epidemic, was hard and heroic. As with Civil Rights, womens' rights, and other struggles, it resulted in real gains, however limited by the continued existence of capitalism and co-option by the Democratic Party.

The capitalists adapted to changing situations. They learned to take advantage of the new social landscape, of the terrain transformed by struggle. This is why some corporations sponsor official Pride events and try to seem progressive in general. These facts should neither surprise nor confuse us.

Nevertheless, with the current neo-fascist trend – intensifying as bourgeois democracy declines – it has become increasingly clear that the capitalists are just as ready to cast off all those trappings of “tolerance.”

The dictator Augusto Pinochet certainly did not pander to progressive forces in Chile after the U.S-backed coup murdered the democratically elected socialist president, Salvadore Allende, inaugurating the global “neoliberal” period. (Some erroneously conflate the austerity economics of neoliberalism with “social liberalism” or progressive politics in general).

Politicians like Ron DeSantis represent a section of the ruling class pushing for that direction. They are ready to destroy every single gain made by workers and oppressed people to extract the last bits of value as the planet burns.

When the formerly left, now right opportunists join in the chorus against “wokeness,” echoing Tucker Carlson and others, we should have no problem recognizing them for what they are: a renegade section of the movement aligning themselves with thoroughly anti-worker neo-fascism.

Today’s revolutionary movement should not give an inch to any of these forces. We need a united working-class movement prepared to confront all attacks with unshakable solidarity.

