



Smash Up Derby podcast

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Earlier this year, my friend Sam Smucker and I started the Smash Up Derby podcast – a podcast about “working class politics.” By working class politics we mean a political perspective rooted in the shop-floor struggle for power in the workplace, expressed through unions or other organizations advocating for working people.

We’ve both been in the labor movement, on and off, for over two decades, and we were both inspired by the Bernie Sanders campaign and [the phenomenal growth of interest in socialist politics in the last year](#). However, we’ve been dismayed by the frequent disconnect between this new political energy on the Left and the labor movement. We started collaborating on this project with the hope that we could bring working class politics to new audiences while producing a show that is fun and entertaining.



Smash Up Derby Podcast

Podcasts — regularly produced audio programs that can be listened to on the web or smartphones (think Netflix for radio) — have seen [explosive growth in popularity recently](#), especially among young people who have been inspired by the Sanders campaign. We aim to discuss shop-floor struggle and the politics that arise from it with the same mixture of irreverent humor and serious analysis that characterize podcasts like [Chapo Trap House](#).

Our [first episode](#) was inspired in part by the discussion of general strikes that was [briefly part of the national conversation](#) during the first month of the Trump administration. We spoke with two academics who study general strikes in Europe, to try to get a sense of what it would take to actually pull off a general strike in the U.S.

Our [second](#) and [third](#) episodes were a two-part interview with retired UE International Representative Terry Davis, about her experiences as a rank and file worker at the Stewart-Warner auto parts factory in Chicago in the 1970s. Davis and her husband helped organize a rank and file movement for democratic, militant trade unionism which eventually brought the shop — [lost to the anticommunist raids in the 1950s](#) — back into the UE in 1980. Our [fifth episode](#) was an interview with another retired UE International Representative, Kim Lawson, about growing up in the working-class towns of northwest Indiana in the 70s and 80s, joining the labor movement as an organizer for the United Farm Workers, and her work in the UE, which included a plant shut-down struggle in Indiana and rebuilding the union's membership in Vermont in the 1990s and 2000s by organizing in the service sector.

We have also taken on current events, putting out [a mini episode](#) in the wake of the stunning British snap election and [a longer episode on healthcare](#) as the American Health Care Act sat in limbo over the July 4th recess. The healthcare episode dives into the labor history of the U.S. healthcare system: how the organization of mass industry and collective bargaining gave rise to employer-based health plans, how the deunionization of the 80s led to a crisis of profitability for the insurance industry, and why employers are invested in

employer-based health care as a form of worker control, even as it costs them more money than a single-payer system.

In July, we [recorded three episodes](#) interviewing socialist trade unionists about the recent surge in membership of Democratic Socialists of America, recorded in the lead-up to DSA's national convention. These episodes explore why socialists activists are important for the labor movement, and how working in the labor movement can help keep socialist politics grounded in the realities of working class life.

This fall we have produced two episodes about more recent labor history. We talked with [a local Teamster activist from Vermont about the 1997 UPS strike](#), and [a Pennsylvania labor organizer who spent some years in the 1990s organizing against the Klan](#) and other right-wing hate groups in rural Pennsylvania.

The Smash Up Derby podcast is still a work in progress, and we would welcome feedback — or ideas for topics to cover or people to interview — from Labor Online readers at smashuppodcast.com/ask or smashuppodcast@gmail.com.

Author



• [Jonathan Kissam](#)