

Charlotte Airport service workers union mounts 24-hour strike during Thanksgiving travel week

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27 November 2024

Hundreds of workers at Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT) in North Carolina walked off the job Monday morning, calling for an end to poverty wages and better working conditions. The strikers work for airline contractors ABM Industries and Prospect, which services American Airlines.

Members of Airport Workers United, a division of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), voted on Friday to mount a 24-hour strike on Monday, the start of the busiest travel week of the year.

Airport Workers United represents the cabin cleaners, wheelchair agents, trash truck drivers and ramp workers who are struggling to survive on \$12.50–\$19 an hour in the Charlotte, North Carolina market.

The highest annual wage for service workers of \$39,500 falls short of the \$70,640 a year that the National Low Income Housing Coalition has determined is required in the Charlotte area for a comfortable living.

According to a recent survey by 32BJ SEIU, 40 percent of CLT workers are housing insecure. Workers reported being homeless, often sleeping at the airport or staying with coworkers. Fifty-five percent report having difficulty paying for utilities or spending nights away from their own home in the past year due to housing instability or financial challenges.

The average rent for a two bedroom apartment in Charlotte is \$1,800 a month. Timothy Lowe II, a Prospect wheelchair agent, was quoted as saying, “Right now, I am homeless. I moved my stuff into a storage unit last month. The problem I am having now is finding an apartment I can get into that I can afford.”

Lowe told the press he has heard of colleagues resorting to sleeping in their cars or U-Hauls due to the

high cost of rent. After finishing his shifts, he said he faces the challenge of figuring out where to sleep for the night. “We just want to be able to have everything that’s a necessity paid for by the job that hired us to do a great job so they can make billions,” he said.

Priscilla Hoyle, an ABM cabin cleaner, shared, “I am a single mother of five. Imagine having to look your babies in the face and tell them they soon may have to leave their home, even though Mommy has a full-time job. I am constantly faced with tough decisions and must make sacrifices to keep food on the table and a roof over my family’s head. One job should be enough.”

“I am tired of struggling and living paycheck to paycheck,” Dorothy Griffin, an ABM worker, told local news. “Sometimes I can’t even order a week’s worth of groceries after I pay my bills because I barely make anything. I’m late on my rent payment now because my paycheck just didn’t cover it.

While the decision to strike shows determination and courage by workers, the SEIU’s decision to limit it to one day was an empty gesture designed to create the illusion of action while actually preventing the mobilization needed to achieve the workers’ demands.

According to Flightaware, there was minimal impact to American’s operations on Monday. Just over 30 flights were delayed, which is usual.

The SEIU covers 40,000 airport service workers across the United States. Mobilizing its entire membership would have had a profound impact on air travel nationwide and brought stakeholders to the negotiating table in quick order.

But the role of the SEIU, as with all union bureaucracies, is to channel worker anger into fruitless

actions and then to isolate them.

Monday's strike at CTL did not appear on the SEIU website. There were no appeals for solidarity to service workers at other airlines operating out of CTL, or SEIU service workers in airports throughout the country.

Last month, the SEIU called a 24-hour strike of 2,700 Michigan Medicine healthcare workers. At least 12,000 hospital employees belonging to various other unions were instructed to cross the picket lines by other healthcare unions rather than stand in solidarity with their brothers and sisters.

A tentative agreement with hospital management was announced by the SEIU and the planned walkout was called off just hours before it was to begin. Employees criticized the last-minute cancellation of the strike and the lack of details they were given regarding the tentative agreement approved by their union.

The SEIU has delivered a long list of betrayals and sellout deals to its membership. In July, the union pushed through a concessions contract with a 12 percent raise over three years, doing little to allay years of being underpaid, to avoid a strike by about 900 library workers at 27 branches in Northeast Ohio.

In September 2023, SEIU members reported voting irregularities during the vote to ratify a contract covering over 100,000 California government workers. Workers claimed the irregularities artificially suppressed the turnout.

The SEIU struck an agreement that deprived nearly 50,000 education workers in Los Angeles out of livable wage increases in March 2023

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2023, the SEIU disregarded thousands of healthcare and janitorial workers in Minnesota, who demanded better pay to address poverty-level wages and urgent measures to address hazardous working conditions.

While SEIU airport service workers were battling homelessness and choosing between which bills they can pay in a month, the union bureaucracy poured \$200 million dollars into the Democratic Party this election cycle, currying favor with the administration responsible for robbing railroad workers of their democratic rights by banning a 2022 strike and imposing a contract workers had overwhelming rejected.

Airport service workers at CLT and elsewhere must build rank-and-file committees where they work,

independent of the bankrupt SEIU apparatus, in order to fight for a living wage and improved working conditions.



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