

Strikes at Amazon and Starbucks in the US called off without any concessions from management

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Thousands of Amazon and Starbucks workers returned to work this week after launching nationwide strikes. Thousands of Amazon drivers ended their week-long strike on Thursday, while an estimated 5,000 Starbucks workers ended a five-day strike on Christmas Day.

The Amazon strike mobilized thousands of drivers at 10 warehouses and delivery stations from California to New York City. The strike involved DBK4 in Queens, New York; DGT8 in Atlanta, Georgia; DFX4, DAX5 and DAX8 near Los Angeles; DCK6 in San Francisco and DIL7 in Skokie, Illinois. Pickets supporting the strike were also set up at Amazon facilities around the country.

Drivers, organized under the Teamsters, are not considered employees by Amazon management. Instead they are considered the employees of over 4,000 independent contracting companies called “delivery service partners” (DSPs). Around 10,000 Amazon delivery drivers nationwide out of nearly 400,000 are Teamster members.

Striking workers raised the central demands of forcing Amazon to recognize their decision to join a union, which the corporate giant has refused to do. It is currently challenging the unionization drives in court, and to be recognized as Amazon employees. Despite having voted to unionize up to two years ago, workers are still without a contract with the company, and management insists that there is no union representation at Amazon.

As contractors, DSP drivers receive low pay, no overtime, unsafe working conditions and no benefits. In Queens, New York, drivers are paid around \$15 an hour in one of the most expensive cities in the country.

They also contend with an oppressive evaluation system that operates like a score for Uber drivers. Drivers and DSPs with higher scores can get more routes assigned by Amazon, but if the score is reduced for any reason the company deems fit, a driver could be penalized. This means drivers can be denied a full 40 hours of work in a week, or they could work over 40 hours and not be paid an overtime rate.

Warehouse workers were not called out for the first few days of the strike, even though warehouse workers at JFK8 in Staten Island were among the first to unionize at Amazon in the United States and have also been without a contract for two years. Warehouse workers at JFK8 and DBK4 in Queens, as well as workers at Amazon’s San Bernardino, California, air hub walked off the job on Saturday to join striking drivers.

The Teamsters claims 5,500 members at JFK8 but did not report on how many workers had joined the picket lines. A reporting team from the WSWs last Saturday found the warehouse operating normally, with a small picket outside dominated by union officials.

Starbucks workers are facing a similar situation. While the company does recognize the Starbucks Workers United (SBWU), it has also not agreed to a contract since the first locations began unionizing in 2021. SBWU launched numerous strike actions in the first years of its organizing, but this is the first and only strike of 2024.

Johnnie Kallas, professor of labor relations at University of Illinois, told ABC News the union conducted around 100 strikes in both 2022 and 2023 but “pivoted toward a more cooperative approach amid negotiations” this year.

This year has reportedly seen more cooperation between the union and the company, conducting at least nine bargaining sessions and reaching 30 separate agreements, according to Starbucks.

The striking workers at more than 300 stores also demanded better pay, benefits and a collective bargaining agreement. The SBWU website includes demands for a base pay of \$20 an hour plus increased hourly rates for more expensive areas and an agreement from management to cease its efforts to block unionization at the company's thousands of locations. Starbucks employs 200,000 people in the US across 10,000 stores. Like Amazon it has worked to block unionization drives and has used intimidation and firings to clamp down on organizing.

Starbucks reportedly offered no immediate wage increase and just a 1.5 percent wage increase in future years. The company claimed that the union was demanding a 77 percent wage increase over the life of the contract, but the union criticized management for supposedly mis-characterizing its demands, although such a wage increase would be entirely justified.

Both strikes have left the demands of workers unresolved. Amazon continues to disregard the unionization of workers under the Teamsters, and both companies have refused to budge on their demands.

While workers are determined to fight against low wage exploitation, the union officials called the strikes to bolster their own credibility. The Teamsters have carried out several major sellouts in the past few years; notably the cancellation of the strike action of rail workers in 2022, the push through of a contract at UPS in 2023 that has allowed the company to move forward with plans for tens of thousands of layoffs and the abandonment of 22,000 Yellow truck drivers last year.

Starbucks Workers United is affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which is closely integrated into the Democratic Party and has sold out several significant struggles, including sellouts at the end of 2023 of 100,000 California state employees, tens of thousands of Kaiser Permanente workers and 30,000 Los Angeles school workers.

This struggle cannot be left in the hands of the trade union bureaucrats, who called off strike action before any demands were met and refused to call on the broader working class in the warehouses and non-unionized locations to join them.

Exemplifying the bankrupt politics of the union bureaucracy, Teamsters President Sean O'Brien spent his time while Amazon drivers are struggling to talk with far-right media personality Tucker Carlson, formerly of Fox News, where he spent most of his time bemoaning how the Democratic Party had gone down the "social justice warrior path" and defending Trump as a pro-labor president. O'Brien is attempting to cozy up with fascistic forces to demonstrate his essential role in upholding labor peace as Trump and the Republicans prepare for a historic assault on the working class. Despite this, the Teamsters and SBWU cannot even win recognition and a contract from management.

These struggles are not over, and Amazon and Starbucks workers will see their fight intersect with a deepening political crisis and broader class struggle under a second Trump administration.



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