

Perryville, Maryland IKEA workers vote to extend strike into the new year

Nick Barrickman
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On December 28, 320 unionized workers at the Perryville IKEA distribution center in northern Maryland voted to remain on strike into the new year after voting down a tentative agreement offered to them by the company and the International Association of Machinists (IAM) union.

The distribution workers have been on strike since mid-November, citing seniority treatment and pay which is below the cost of living.

“Seniority is the most important thing here,” said striking worker Lisa Mengel in a video statement released by More Perfect Union. “It keeps favoritism at bay. If they don’t care for you, if you’re not one of their ‘favorites’ they can give you less likeable jobs. They can move you from one job to another... without any real concern about your ability” to keep up.

A review of the job on Indeed notes, “your daily duties change for whatever manager on duty’s priorities are at that moment. one never gets a chance to complete a job and then is asked why it wasn’t done.” According to the job listing site, the average worker at the facility makes around \$39,000 a year, about half of the median income level in Perryville.

The distribution hub delivers to 39 retail stores throughout the United States and Canada, and is located approximately halfway between Baltimore and Philadelphia on the economically critical Interstate-95 corridor. In August, the warehouse became the first IKEA hub in the country to introduce AI-powered inventory-checking drones to fly alongside workers “24/7,” according to the technology publication The Verge.

In 2012, the facility was the first IKEA hub in the US to unionize, as 320 of the location’s 550 employees are organized as part of IAM Local 460.

The strike has been turbulent, with multiple arrests on

the picket line. In late November, local press reported an unnamed union official was arrested for blocking traffic to the facility and “disturbing the peace,” after police confronted workers for picketing outside the entrance.

On December 19, over a month after the strike began, another worker, Joshua Anthony Wescott, was arrested on the picket line for blocking traffic and disorderly conduct. Authorities allege Wescott, 33, was intoxicated.

Workers at IKEA have courageously opted to continue their fight for improved living conditions. This is part of an international industrial upsurge within the working class as workers in industry after industry rebel against pro-management contracts and offers, demanding their living standards be met.

Despite their determination, workers’ struggles are being hamstrung by the union bureaucracy. The IAM union, which represents nearly 600,000 workers throughout the United States and is described by WBAL news radio as “one of North America’s largest and most diverse industrial trade unions,” has largely stood by, offering little more than poverty level strike pay and boilerplate public relation commentary while appealing to so-called “labor friendly” officials in the US capitalist political establishment.

Following the first arrest on the picket line in December, the IAM pathetically accused the company of using “Heavy-Handed Tactics” and filed a complaint with the Biden White House’s Labor Department. It also published a letter written by Maryland Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen calling on management to “bargain in good faith.”

This is a continuation of the IAM’s strategy employed during the powerful Boeing aerospace workers strike on the West Coast during fall. Over

33,000 Boeing machinists struck for over a month, rejecting two sellout tentative agreement offers which failed to address cost of living and retirement benefit demands.

IAM officials worked with the company and representatives from the White House to force through a corporate-friendly deal while stringing workers along at strike-pay levels of \$250 a week, which they didn't start to receive until several weeks after the strike began.

Following the strike, Boeing moved forward with plans to eliminate 17,000 employees, including many workers previously on strike. Workers were not informed of the layoff notices until after the strike, as management and the union, along with the White House negotiators, had preferred not to let the news interfere with their efforts to defeat the workers on strike.



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