

Nationwide strike at Costco set to begin Saturday

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Costco workers: Tell us what demands you are preparing to strike for by filling out the form below! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On February 1, 2025, 18,000 Costco workers in the Teamsters union are set to go on strike in five states, the largest strike of the new year in the United States.

More than 90 percent of Costco workers are not unionized, but the strike will still affect 56 out of 617 warehouse stores. Costco workers are demanding higher wages, improved working conditions, better benefits, seniority pay, paid family leave, bereavement policies, sick time and safeguards against surveillance.

Despite the company's image as a "worker-friendly" alternative to Walmart and Amazon, its employees face grueling conditions, erratic scheduling, and wages that have not kept pace with inflation. Entry pay is \$19.50 an hour. Many workers report physically demanding shifts with little time for breaks, constant understaffing, and management's relentless drive for profit at the expense of safety.

One worker in Irvine told the WSWS that they can't even take breaks: "You're supposed to, but it's just very busy and sometimes you just got to push it off a little bit."

Another Costco driver of 30 years complained: "To tell you the truth, we know absolutely nothing. We're not being told anything. I'm going to have a pension, but I'm worried that the younger ones—and there's a lot of young workers here—will not have a pension. We don't know what's going on."

Costco's immense profitability—bringing in over \$250 billion in revenue and a net income of \$7.3 billion in 2024 alone—has been built on the backs of these workers. Meanwhile, executive compensation continues to soar: Costco's Chief Executive Officer, Ron M. Vachris, received a total compensation package of

approximately \$12.2 million in 2024.

The strike is set to unfold amid a massive assault against immigrant workers by Trump, the tip of the spear of his bid for a presidential dictatorship. It also coincides with a strike vote by King Soopers grocery workers in Colorado, affiliated to United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and thousands of Safeway workers in that state who are working without a contract. Over the course of the year, contracts for tens of thousands more grocery workers are due to expire.

This demonstrates the potential for a broader struggle of the whole working class, which must be mobilized in defense of immigrants and democratic rights. This requires the building of independent rank-and-file committees which, as the Socialist Equality Party explained in a recent statement, "will strive to break down all efforts by the two big business parties and the trade union bureaucracies to divide workers along immigration status or national background."

On this last point, the Teamsters bureaucracy, under General President Sean O'Brien, is lining up behind Trump's racist "America First" rhetoric and attacks on immigrants. He has founded his own podcast, "Better Bad Ideas" which he uses as a platform for right-wingers such as Missouri Senator Josh Hawley, a major Trump ally and co-conspirator in the events of January 6, 2021. This is part of a broader shift by union officials across the country, who have all declared their "willingness" to work with Trump.

But attempts to present Trump's program in pseudo-populist colors are rapidly breaking down as the scale of his attacks on immigrants and the Constitution becomes clear.

The unity of the working class requires that workers of all backgrounds defend the rights of immigrants.

Immigrant workers make up about 20 percent of the grocery store workforce in the United States, and likely thousands of immigrants will be involved in Saturday's strike, especially in areas like Southern California with large immigrant populations. The political environment is such that is entirely possible that ICE agents could grab striking Costco workers off the picket lines.

In reality, workers across the globe—whether in the U.S., Mexico, Canada, or beyond—face the same exploitation at the hands of transnational corporations. Costco's business model relies on a global supply chain that squeezes workers at every level, from warehouse employees in the U.S. to factory workers in Asia.

By aligning with Trump, O'Brien and the union officials express their hostility and fear of the workers they claim to represent.

During the 2023 UPS contract struggle, the Teamsters leadership betrayed 340,000 workers. After months of militant rhetoric, O'Brien and the Teamsters bureaucracy imposed a contract that paved the way for massive layoffs, including the closure or automation of 200 UPS facilities.

The Costco strike is following the same script. While O'Brien is posturing as a militant fighter, the aim of the bureaucracy is to contain workers' anger within the framework of what is acceptable to the two big business parties and corporate America. The Teamsters leadership will attempt to isolate the strike, avoid any broader movement of the working class, and ultimately push through a contract that falls far short of what workers need and deserve.

Critical of the union's role, a 67-year-old Costco worker told the WSWS that he had had three strokes, which slowed him down. "I got written up on three annual reviews because I'm going slower." After his second stroke, "they were treating me like a regular employee but I'm going slower, you know, because I was limping and stuff. I told our union rep, he says, 'this is beyond the scope of my duties, I can't help you.'"

He continued: "I was crying after I got off, and I said, listen, if you ask a hundred people, they think the union has the ability to help someone who's doing the job and had two strokes." He appealed to the Local president: "She said, he [union rep] is right, there's nothing that we can do to help you. And I said, wow,

that is mind blowing."

Workers at Costco, King Soopers, and beyond must reject any attempt to isolate their struggles. The union bureaucracies will attempt to divide these fights into separate, toothless negotiations that ensure the continuation of unacceptable conditions.

This is a political struggle because it pits the working class against corporate America and the entire political establishment. To win it, Costco workers must break free from the grip of the Teamsters bureaucracy and take matters into their own hands. The only viable path forward is the formation of independent rank-and-file committees, controlled by workers themselves and committed to real struggle.

These committees must organize democratically, independent of the union bureaucracy, to fight for workers' real demands and link up with workers in other industries facing similar struggles, including logistics, retail and manufacturing. They must reject the domination of both corporate parties, who serve the interests of big business, join in a struggle against Trump's fascist agenda, and forge international connections with Costco and other workers worldwide.



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